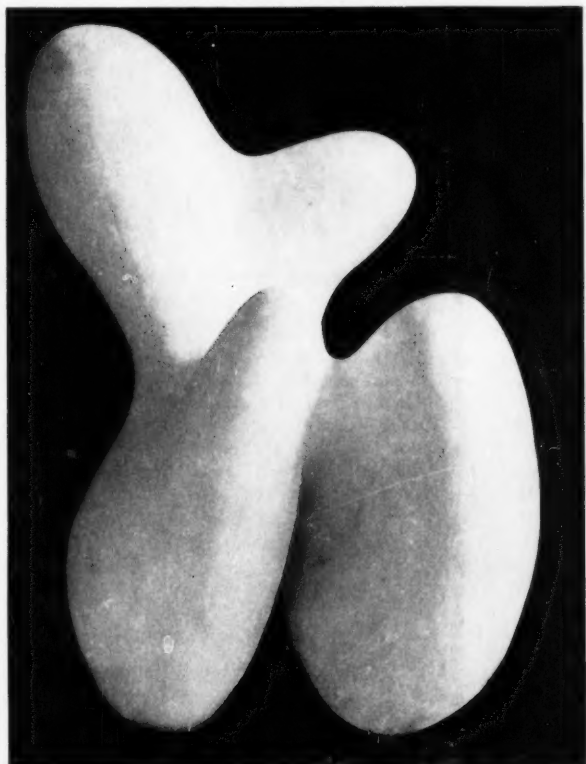


# *MAGAZINE OF ART*

MAY 1952 75 CENTS THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS



UMBRO APOLLONIO: **ALBERTO VIANI**

MICHEL SEUPHOR: **PIET MONDRIAN—1914-18**

CAROL ARONOVICI: **CIVIC ART**

GEORGE BOAS: **CIVILIZATION AND ROUTINE**

WYLIE SYPHER: **THE LATE-BAROQUE IMAGE—POUSSIN AND RACINE**

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**Cover:** *Nude* (16), 1945, plaster, 47½" high (see p. 205)

# REGIONALISM— NATIONALISM— INTERNATIONALISM

WITH the winter season over, and exhibition schedules slowed or interrupted until the end of summer, one's thoughts turn to the international showings to be held abroad and at home: "Masterpieces of the Twentieth Century" in Paris this month, sculpture in an outdoor setting at Arnhem, the Biennale at Venice and the Carnegie International at Pittsburgh next fall. Moreover, one thinks of these international salons in the light of the tremendous Cézanne exhibition staged jointly by the Art Institute of Chicago and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The connection between Cézanne of fifty years ago and these contemporary exhibitions is less obscure than it may seem: Cézanne has long been recognized as the "father of modern art." Therefore this show has a different significance for today than would a similar gathering of the works of an old master (which in another sense Cézanne obviously is), and it is more than a simple chance to study the esthetic personality of a great artist. It is in its own way a demonstration of the international character of modern art—and that so many of the canvases of this French artist should come from American collections points beyond the wealth that has allowed them to be bought out of Europe, to the generally accepted beginnings of a modern style.

Of course American art has before this found its form within an international movement. Allston and Cole, if they are American by virtue of place, were romantic through accident of time; and if their romanticism gets its character and color from the American atmosphere of ideas as much as from the local landscape, it is after all still romanticism, and so part of an attitude larger than any national boundaries. Cole paints the *Oxbow* and the *Roman Aqueduct* in the same spirit, and the *Fall of Empire* is born out of the combined view of Italy's classic ruins and America's untouched forests. Before Cole and Allston, our colonial painters, and afterwards the mid-century realists, were perhaps less aware of their part in a broader style, and more concerned with the accurate rendering of the local scene—portrait or landscape. But their art was as much part of the general Western culture of their generation as it was characteristic of the country of their birth. This is especially true of those nineteenth-

century realists who have been so often suggested as revealing the "true nature of the American artistic vision when undistorted by foreign influences" for realism was a period style—in Europe as in the United States.

Out of this realism—basically but belatedly—developed the regionalism that was for a while a characteristic manifestation of American art. Regionalism was thus our own retarded version of a period style, and not by any means a pure American phenomenon in the sense that the esthetic isolationists who fastened upon it desired it to be. It is therefore not surprising that, as has been frequently noted of late, regionalism has all but disappeared, and that younger artists from California to New England are working from common stylistic bases—bases that may not be uniform, but which are certainly not local. They are not even purely national but stem from a broad common comprehension of the development of modern art as an international movement. Thus the work being done in Chicago, New York, Paris, London and San Francisco bears striking resemblances.

Is American art then to become increasingly indistinguishable from that done abroad? This is not the conclusion, for whatever their affinities, a Boudin and a Homer of the 1860's are clearly different, and an Inness cannot be confused with a Rousseau or a Corot. But while our own art continues to have its special character within the changing tradition of Western art, its relation to that tradition is altered in two major respects:

First, the time-lag that used to exist—as it did at any place distant from the center—has now disappeared, and the styles presently practiced here are not only related to, but simultaneous with, those being carried on elsewhere. Undoubtedly this is in part due to the rapid carrying of news and the facility of visual dissemination inherent in our mechanical era. But it is also a sign that the center has shifted, or better, that there are now various centers (or none), and instead mutual creative influence and simultaneous development spread over two continents.

Secondly, because twentieth-century art is personal and inward (compared to that of the nineteenth century), the native character of our creation will no longer be distinguishable by external labels. Of course, it never really was. The Catskills (instead of the Apennines) are not what makes Cole an American, nor does Long Branch (instead of Honfleur) alone separate Homer from Boudin. But those labels made it easy, and lacking them, we must look more closely at the nature and character of the art itself. This will as always continue to bear resemblances to what is being done abroad. But precisely because it will be more personal and so more diverse than ever before, and because, temporally, it will now be in the vanguard, it will though less regional be more American than ever before. Thus the father of modern art belongs in America, as our artists belong in the Biennale.

R. G.

# CIVILIZATION AND ROUTINE

*George Boas*



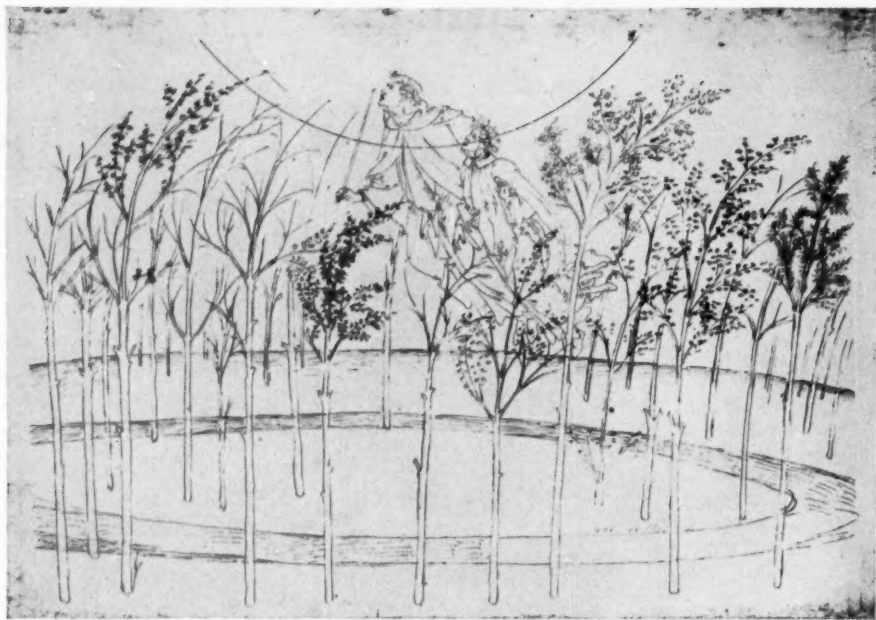
Charles Sheeler, *River Rouge Plant*, 1932, oil, 20 x 24", Whitney Museum of American Art

As one reads the works of observers of our country, one is struck by the diversity of their comments. To Georges Duhamel, America is the land of horrible *abattoirs* and skyscrapers, a nightmare of long roads going nowhere, of machines

grinding out useless objects which we struggle to possess, of noise, materialism and violence. To D. W. Brogan it is a country whose people have been conditioned by the extremes of climate, varying in a season from the most infernal heat to the



Thomas Cole,  
*The Oxbow*  
(Connecticut River  
near Northampton),  
1836, oil,  
51½ x 76",  
Metropolitan  
Museum of Art



Sandro Botticelli, *Illustration for Dante's Divine Comedy: Paradise I*, 1492-97 (from L. Venturi, *Botticelli*, Phaidon, 1947)



Ma Fen, *The Hundred Wild Geese*  
(Detail I), Sung Dynasty,  
late 11th century A.D., ink,  
Honolulu Academy of Arts

most cramping cold, of tornadoes, cyclones, earthquakes, floods, a succession of natural disasters. To Madariaga, to André Siegfried, to Philip Wylie, it is still other things. All have the key to America, and no two keys open the same doors. So it is now and so it has always been. To read Lord Bryce is to find things which Mrs. Trollope overlooked; to read Dickens, details unknown to Tocqueville.

If one were to collect all these opinions upon our country, one would find that the American was brutal in business affairs and yet charitable in time of trouble; individualistic and law-breaking, and yet patient under social discipline; highly standardized and yet having no one set of values; loving children and yet cruel to weak minorities; spending millions on schools and nothing on public housing; dedicating hospitals by the score and yet making pest-holes of his cities; bequeathing fortunes to museums and yet never buying a work of art for himself; free and easy in his manners and yet careful lest he violate the prescriptions of Mrs. Emily Post; rough in his humor and yet devoted to the childlike fantasies of Walt Disney; wasteful of the land and yet keeping up the national parks; spending more money on cosmetics than on education and yet producing great engineers and technicians. One could continue this list of paradoxes and contradictions at will, for all are true—and sometimes true not only of the mass, but also of the individual.

For it is obvious that the same G.I. who coddled French and German children and stuffed them with candy bars was also a veritable tiger at the front, and the same millionaire who leaves his fortune for the alleviation of cancer has also been indifferent to the existence of slums. Professors of ethics have not always been famous for their morals, and even artists have lived in houses which were not models of good taste. Societies, like individuals, are never all of a piece but are made up of conflicting sheaves of tendencies; and out of the conflict and tension comes a sort of reconciliation of opposites—as in a picture the different thrusts and pulls develop a kind of balance which is all the more interesting because of the drama involved.

But one thing can be said with certainty: that in every society, as in every individual, some ways of doing things become ritualized, like habits or traditions, and that as they become more and more a matter of habit they become more and more compulsive. It is thanks to this principle that we all speak a language which most of us can understand, wear costumes similar in general cut, sit on chairs rather than on mats, and use the decimal system in counting. Nevertheless no legislature has ever been able to impose its standards with complete success. There may be books on English grammar which seek to erect laws of correct usage, but grammar changes nevertheless from age to age. Men no longer wear lace at their cuffs and powdered wigs. And though we still have twelve and not ten inches to the foot, we

have ten and not twelve pennies to the dime, and no shillings. So in the mountains of Kentucky and Tennessee people are said to speak Elizabethan English; but in New York and San Francisco Elizabethan English exists only in books. In Australia there are mammals which lay eggs; the European mammals produce their young alive. My rural neighbors in Maryland light their rooms with kerosene if they live off the highways, but those who live on them wire their houses for electricity.

In all societies which are in contact with other societies, the inertia of custom ceases to operate, and manners, speech, artistry and all the other expressions of the human spirit change. The mere association with new people brings questioning of one's own customs; and when a question is put, it is as likely to be answered in the affirmative as in the negative. It was only a generation or so ago that African art and even oriental art were considered more fit for the curio cabinet than for the art museum, but now I doubt whether a man could be found willing to admit that a Sung painting was not worthy to hang alongside a Botticelli, or whether the museum exists which would not gladly accept and even exhibit a Benin bronze. For the acquaintance which we have had with exotic works of art has made us question the exclusive rightness of European art, and the answer has been in the direction of acceptance rather than in that of rejection. The history of taste thus shows a constant interplay between what might be called ritual and improvisation, tradition and novelty, the static and the dynamic.

But the same thing is illustrated in the history of art itself. One can find periods, like the Byzantine, when on the whole tradition seems to have had the upper hand (though I suspect that an experienced eye would see more growth in Byzantine painting than our fathers would have seen). There have been other periods, like the present, when a high price is set upon originality, personality, invention. But even today we find almost every stage of painting being exemplified in what our artists produce, the school of Ingres being as productive as the school of Picasso, if there be such a school. Modern art, in the chronological sense of the word "modern," includes the academic painters who would have found an honorable place in the salons beside Bonnat, Couture and Bouguereau, abstractionists, symbolists, surrealists, primitivists, propagandists for social reform, religious painters of the school of Saint Sulpice, non-objectivists, and so on *ad indefinitum*.

Now this is usually spoken of as social and cultural confusion, as anarchy, as a lack of discipline, as the absence of a unifying cultural force. I have never been a worshipper of unity, not having been able to see that the number 1 was any better or nobler or finer than any other number. With the possible, but improbable, exception of some small and isolated coral islands and some individuals protected in mental hospitals, most socie-



Andrew Wyeth, *Karl*, 1948, oil, 30  $\frac{1}{8}$  x 23  $\frac{3}{8}$ ",  
collection Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, New York,  
courtesy Macbeth Gallery



A. H. Maurer, *Head in Landscape*, 1929, oil, 39 x 23  $\frac{1}{4}$ ",  
collection Mr. & Mrs. Roy R. Neuberger, New York,  
photograph Oliver Baker

ties and individuals have been complex. Our so-called cultural anarchy is testimony to the fertility of the American creative imagination, to the freedom from academic domination, to the ability which we still have to solve our individual problems in our own individual ways. Without this kind of anarchy, civilization would petrify, and people would still be communicating through smoke signals and tom-toms instead of over the long-distance telephone.

That which others call traditionalism, I should prefer to call routine. Routine is what one observes in the beehive and the anthill and in all those societies in which a group of men have the power to decide the limits of questioning, and consequently the range of permissible answers. Such discipline, aided by sword and fire, was tried for a while with results which every reader of occidental history knows. Routine is excellent as a device when no change occurs in social problems. A few people living on an island far from other people, where the climate is equable and stable, where there are plenty of fish in the sea and plenty of coconuts on the palms, where the population is always about the same, neither suddenly increased nor suddenly diminished, where there is no ingress of foreigners nor emigration of natives—a few people of this sort have no need for

novelty, for the simple reason that no new problems confront them. So the beehive can go from year to year, from century to century, following the apian tradition, the queen laying her eggs, the drones fertilizing her at the proper moment and being killed afterwards, the workers gathering the pollen and nectar to make into pollen-cakes and honey. But when the beehive is overturned or invaded by field mice or moths, the bees are helpless to invent some technique for remedying the evil. They can die by stinging their adversaries, but they can neither devise new means of fortifying the hive, nor develop a set of warrior bees who will specialize in defense, nor take to living in tree tops or in rock-crannies where their enemies cannot find them. Their social organization is a triumph of efficiency—but it is an efficiency purchased at the price of the future's always repeating the past.

So the traditionalist in art can go on forever painting the same pictures in the same way, regardless of what new esthetic problems society may place before him. The routine of academic painting was highly successful as long as society remained what it was before the nineteenth century, when the painter was patronized by an aristocracy which was able to patronize him. But when a man like Daumier arose whose eye was

sensitive to the difference between his society and that of his father, when he saw emerging in the Restoration and in the bourgeois monarchy new men and new classes which were beginning to dominate his country, he could do nothing but paint what he saw taking place in the most sincere manner of which he was capable. He saw, for instance, the new position occupied by lawyers in a state in which legislation, rather than social prestige, had become dominant, when economic power was taking the place of royal prerogative; and his series of cartoons lampooning the lawyers must have contributed enormously to changing men's ideas about the rulers of their society. Similarly when he saw the seventeenth-century notions about classical art in painting and sculpture and literature had become obsolete, he set about to show their obsolescence in that great series of caricatures of the classical drama and pictorial nudity. None of this means to imply that the old routine was immediately abandoned. On the contrary, it continued to flourish, as most obsolete institutions flourish, in the cloisters that the groups whose interests it served had erected for their protection. A cloistered society is nothing new. The Iron Curtain is an ancient device for keeping new ideas out as well as for keeping old ideas in. Nor do I know of any obsolete ritual

which has ever been completely abandoned.

The United States, like France and England, has always been a country in which innovation has had its due and was balanced by tradition. No culture could survive for a week which was confronted by so much novelty that it had to meet every problem as if it were to be solved in some new way. But we have been especially favored in that we have not had to drag along with us survivals of so ancient a past as those which existed in our sister democracies. Moreover, this country was founded by men and women who belonged to dissident sects, each claiming the right to interpret sacred texts according to his own lights. Accustomed to individual interpretation, these people could not easily bring themselves to think of a new idea as intrinsically evil. On the contrary, one was more likely to find an instinctive attraction to novelty as foolish in its way as the instinctive repulsion to it. No one to be sure can ever be entirely original, in speech, in ideas, in manners, in dress, in food habits, in methods of research, in religious worship, in love and hate, in marriage and death. For if we stop merely to think of the methods of interpretation which are at our disposal, we have to recognize, as we were saying a moment ago, at least a common speech, a speech which may vary in dialect and vocabulary, but

*Honoré Daumier, After the Trial, wash drawing, 11 x 14"*



which is fundamentally the same throughout the country. The Connecticut Yankee may have a little trouble in understanding a Texan's drawl, but it is not a herculean task to talk with him. In some countries it might be possible to set up in the capital a board which would have the job of regularizing dialects, whose commandments would be law, and which could even punish people for dropping their final *g*'s and for syncopating vowels. How effective such boards would be is more questionable. After all the *Académie Française* has been in existence for three hundred years; it has published a dictionary which presumably contains the correct pronunciation of every word in the French language; it solemnly meets to admit or not to admit new words to the dictionary. And the Toulousain goes right along speaking with a Toulouse accent and the Parisian with a Parisian, and every once in a while the Academy has to yield and admit in print that words which everyone has been saying for a generation or two have officially become French.

Even our lawmakers have been faced with similar situations. When I was a boy in Rhode Island, it was a crime for any citizen of that state to cross the borders of Massachusetts. But that did not prevent anyone who wanted to go from Providence to Boston from getting on a train and going. Would it be criminal libel to point out that the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad connived at this? I can recall no ticket seller in Providence ever asking me whether I was a resident of Rhode Island when I bought a ticket for Boston, heinous as his negligence may have been. It was only two or three years ago that the legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts woke up to this horrible fact and instead of setting up armed guards on its frontiers to prevent the ingress of Rhode Islanders, simply repealed the law. This amounted to admitting that time had actually changed something or other, and that if Rhode Islanders in the eighteenth century might have corrupted the morals of the citizens of their sister state, in the twentieth century they were less likely to. But why did not the lawmakers just thunder that right is right and wrong is wrong and never the twain shall meet? Could they not have argued that if something was wrong in 1750 it is also wrong in 1950? Do moral standards change like styles? Was the repeal of this law, passed no doubt to preserve the purity of the Puritans, a lily-livered submission to passing fads, showing a complete lack of moral stamina, an absence of integrity, a shifting of standards from the realm of the eternal to that of the temporal?

Such questions are of course purely rhetorical. But turn now to the field of the arts. For generations men painted pictures which not only represented physical objects in a way which made them recognizable to the most untutored eye, but they painted them in exactly the same way, with a foreground, middle ground and background,

with a single source of illumination, viewed from a standard point of view, the eye on a level with the middle of the horizon, and with an accuracy of drawing acquired from the study of plaster casts of Roman copies of Greek statues. That routine was sanctified. It was the right way to paint and everyone knew it. One could go to an art school and learn how. Books were printed on how to do it. The routine was so solidly established that when Courbet had the effrontery to announce that no subject was more sacred than any other, and that each artist was an individual who could not take on the vision of another but must perforce see with his own eyes—surely two statements which were self-evident—he was criticized not merely as someone with a new idea, but as a revolutionist who would turn art upside down, make a cult of the Ugly, and violate all the sacred principles of tradition. On the one hand you had the spokesmen for routine, on the other the spokesmen for civilization.

The history of the arts is a lesson to all who have a mind to learn from the experiences of others that an established routine is substituted for civilization when men grow too weary to solve their problems or too discouraged or too browbeaten. At such times the genuine novelty of a new situation is flatly denied. And there is a certain reason for denying it. For every situation in history retains some elements of the past, just as a human being who matures does not forget at each new moment all his past but on the contrary carries it along with him. But the retention of the past in memory, whether it be personal or social memory, should not obscure the elements of novelty which arrive as the future emerges. Thus when the railroads began to span the American continent, the frontier began to disappear, and as the cities spread into the country, rural life also began to disappear. One could always flee before the receding frontier up to a certain point, but sooner or later the point was bound to be reached beyond which retreat was impossible. Similarly as the rural districts became electrified, crisscrossed with good roads, connected by telephone and radio, the isolation of the pioneer farmer dwindled, and the rugged individual who built his own house of sods, cut his own fuel, lighted his dwelling with homemade tallow candles or bayberry dips, dug his own well, starved in time of famine and drought, and buried two-thirds of his offspring before they reached the age of ten, dwindled along with it. And though one may deplore the loss of so picturesque a life, still there is some comfort in not having to worry about diphtheria and scarlet fever and rickets and pneumonia, in being able to reach a doctor in a few minutes by telephone, and in having machines to do what it took man, wife and children to do a few years ago.

There may very well be people who are bewildered by their new safety, and who would be happier if they had the old problems to solve—



Edgar Degas,  
Women Combing their Hair,  
1875-76, oil, 12 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ ",  
Phillips Gallery,  
Washington, D. C.



Adolphe W. Bouguereau,  
Music of the Sea,  
1885, oil, 51 $\frac{1}{2}$  x 33 $\frac{3}{4}$ ",  
courtesy John Levy Galleries,  
photograph Savastano

problems of the early nineteenth century, before modern industrial America was more than a possibility. If they are really unhappy in modern times, there are still a few places to which they can escape and where they may live in the ignorance and squalor of what Mr. Lewis Mumford calls the eo-technic period. But the great mass of Americans—and Europeans and Asiatics too—prefer to face the present and to benefit from what it has to give them. No one can deny that a highly industrialized civilization is both a threat to spiritual freedom and an encouragement to it. It cannot be too often repeated that in the machine age there are both nightmare and hope. There is nightmare for those who have fallen victim to routine and who cannot pull themselves out of the rituals which the nineteenth century developed. They are like neurotics who cannot change their pattern of living, having become enmeshed in another scheme of things. Their lives consist of conditioned reflexes and their minds are reduced to the condition of Pavlov's dog. It takes no great imagination to picture for oneself the misery of such a life. But for the man who utilizes the advantages of industry for his own liberation, such a civilization is the only one in which he has the leisure to think and to dream and to solve new problems in their own terms, not in the terms of an inherited past which are no longer applicable.

It is precisely civilization in that sense of the word which we possess in America and France and Great Britain. We have neither an all-powerful clergy to forbid us to let our thoughts stray to profane subjects nor an all-powerful Minister of Education to organize our laboratories and schools. We have no Secretary of Fine Arts to tell us what is beautiful and what is ugly, no political dictator to make a travesty of voting. Our scientists are still free to experiment and so are our artists. We have no censors to speak of whose arbitrary decrees cramp the human imagination. But the danger of all these horrors is always present, for America is no more guaranteed against sterility than any other country. The oscillation between ritual and improvisation, between routine and civilization, is to be found here as everywhere else, though there is still a greater chance for a man here to be himself and not just another pattern stamped out by a universal die.

That chance will however disappear, as it has disappeared elsewhere, if our fear and hatred get control over us, and if we run whimpering to hide in caves or fortresses from every wind that blows. There are plenty of people here who prefer the security of authority to the adventurousness of freedom, and by using such question-begging epithets as discipline, order, harmony, they make out a good case for their philosophy. But their discipline is indoctrination, their order is military drill, their harmony is unison. They would have us all believe the same thing, walk in the same path, sing the same song. Such a life is

a mockery of human life; it is the life of puppets or shadows on a screen. If there is one thing which America can still give the world, it is the combination of strength with courage. Many of us have turned traitor to this ideal and have urged that we use our strength to dominate not only less fortunate people but also those of our fellow citizens who deviate from the norm set up by a minority group of obstinate men.

It is the peculiar privilege of those concerned with the arts to do their share in preventing this disaster. For the arts can only thrive when an artist is an individual, seeing the world in his own way and speaking with his own voice, not that of a master. That was not always so, and we know that at times in the past there was a greater homogeneity of artistry, so great that one can date and locate a picture simply by its style. Those times are not ours. Nor is there any reason to deplore this state of affairs. A society like that of the United States is complex, stratified, its groups in conflict. It is an unfinished society, not like some academic pictures of the nineteenth century, so highly varnished, slick and impeccable that all traces of its maker's brush have been eliminated. Such a society has to be dynamic in order to live at all, and its dynamism will be preserved only if a larger number of its members make every sacrifice to preserve the arts and keep unwavering vigilance over their freedom.

When one goes to France, occupied by the enemy for five years, devastated and impoverished and mutilated, one sees on every hand evidence of that creative energy which the French seem never to have lost. Similarly in England, whose people carried the burden of a gigantic war alone for two years and who even amid the ruins began planning a newer and brighter England. Surely Americans are not ready to throw in the sponge, to bow to authority, to defeat the totalitarians by becoming totalitarian, to become slaves rather than masters of their wealth and power.

The greatest peril which we face today is not that which lurks in the Kremlin but that which lies trembling in our own hearts: fear and self-distrust. One turns back at such times to Emerson and Thoreau, to Thomas Cole and Kensett, to James and Royce and Dewey, to Willard Gibbs and Rowland, to Gilman and Charles Eliot, as men who made American civilization, who not only dared to be themselves and to speak their own words, but who were given every opportunity to do so. They too had their enemies, they met with plenty of ridicule and still do, but they worsted their enemies and they faced the ridicule with stamina. They represent but one side of the American tradition, but it is they and their fellows who have made this country respected and admired, not the conformists and bosses and dictators and authoritarians. They are our America; and if we should forget them, we would slump into a routine that would be little more than cultural paralysis.

# ALBERTO VIANI

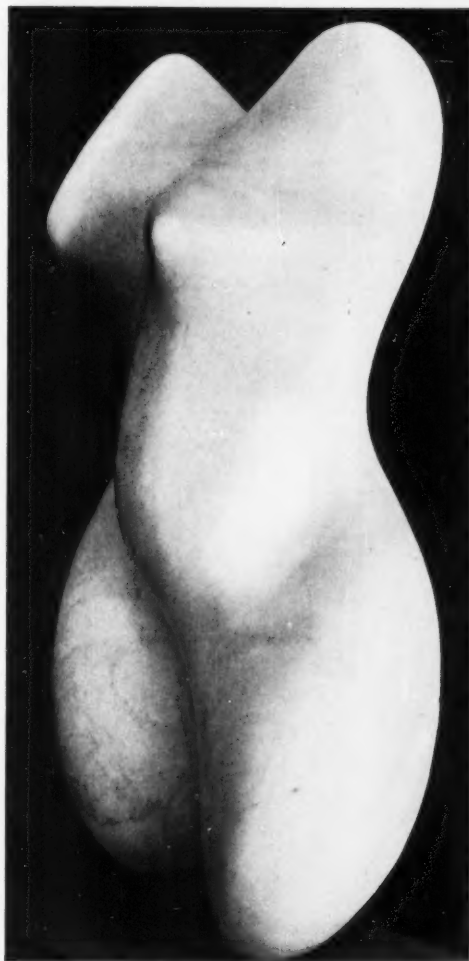
## *Umbro Apollonio*

I FIRST came to know the sculptor Alberto Viani in the winter of 1941, when I saw the *Male Torso* (1)—his first work to achieve any reputation—and a *Female Figure* (3) of 1940. Both were works with closed forms, only slightly hollowed-out contours, a few calligraphic incisions, which still lacked signs of a developed personal style. But the next *Male Torso* (4) of 1941, within whose unusually powerful masses the planes obey a rhythmic law felicitously suggested by its outlines, clearly revealed a quite extraordinary talent. From then on I followed every work of Viani, each one strengthening my opinion that, even in his brief experimental pauses, he is one of the most important sculptors of our time.

In those sad days, when we vainly sought to find in art some solace from the harsh realities of contemporary events, Viani had already been teaching for a year at the Liceo Artistico. He had as yet no name as an artist, and until 1944 his sculpture was unknown except to a few chosen friends. I have not been able to find any work of his dating from before 1939; if there were any, he must have destroyed them as mere exercises which he would now regard as unworthy. More probably, however, he actually did no work before that year, for everything he does comes out of a long period of reflection, in which he seeks to define his poetic vision precisely, leaving nothing to chance or improvisation. His sculptures evolve out of a series of innumerable sketches; these, which may occupy him for months at a time, form a solid basis for the actual project.

Viani was born on March 26th, 1906, at Quistello in the province of Mantua and studied at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Venice. There in 1944 he became an assistant in sculpture to Arturo Martini. From this master he acquired a predilection for freedom of representation and some notion of how to compose plastic forms in space. During the summer of 1944 he held his first public showing in the Piccola Galleria of Venice. He exhibited one work at the Arco gallery in the same city in the summer of 1946 and competed for the Spiga Prize in Milan. The following May he had a one-man show at the Galleria dello Scorpione in Trieste and in June took part in the first group exhibition of the *Fronte Nuovo delle Arti* in Milan. In 1948 he was invited to take part in the fourth Quadriennale at Rome

**Note:** Numbers in parentheses refer to the catalogue of Viani's work appended to this article on page 208.



*Female Torso* (115), 1945, marble, 43 $\frac{1}{4}$ " high, Museum of Modern Art

and the twenty-fourth Biennale in Venice, where the five works he displayed won for him the prize awarded to a young sculptor.

By this time, Viani's name was beginning to be more widely known, and he received his first favorable notices from the critics. Nevertheless, when Arturo Martini died Viani left his post at the Academy in Venice—where he had never been really welcome—and went back to the Liceo Artistico, where he still teaches. In 1949, his *Seated Nude* (24) won the Varese Prize. He was also represented in the exhibition of Twentieth-Century Italian Art held in that year at the Museum of Modern Art, which subsequently acquired

his *Female Torso* (15). The following year he was asked to take part in the twenty-fifth Biennale of Venice, the sculpture exhibition of the Royal Scottish Academy at Edinburgh and the outdoor Exposition Internationale at Antwerp. The newly formed Musée Communal de Sculpture en Plein Air in the latter city shortly afterwards bought the *Seated Nude* which had previously won for him the Varese Prize.

This is the brief story of Viani's career. He is completely shy of publicity, without any revolutionary pose whatsoever; a man connected with no group interests but living strictly to himself, absorbed in his lyrical visions. About these he is as reserved and scrupulous as he is in his philosophical and theological readings.

A sculpture of Viani's may be described as a plastic organism isolated in its own mass and developed within the logic of a closed contour. It is the felicitous manner in which he varies his han-

dling of the solid volumes that proves how acutely sensitive is his conception. By means of a mass modeled with such severity that the surfaces seem to skim over the block of marble with gradual polishings and corrections, he is able to express in the most precisely balanced manner his underlying lyricism. His expression has a vital flow of its own, which however daring it may be is never marred by arbitrary deformations. His sculpture is so solid and complete as to transcend mere reminiscence of the models—Arp, Laurens or Picasso—who inspired him as a beginner.

Certain stubborn *laudatores temporis acti*, unable to see good anywhere but in the past, have cited such influences in disparagement of Viani. Now there is certainly no denying that in addition to creative imagination there is also such a thing as a creative culture, and that objective differences of opinion may arise either from profound and personal preferences, or on the other hand from

*Seated Nude* (10), 1942, plaster, 47 1/4" high, collection Ragghianti, Florence



formalistic, opportunistic and pragmatic considerations of a wholly external nature. What is important is to state firmly that Viani's mature works stem from so original and personal an impulse as to exclude them from any functional, hence direct, connection with either cultural or polemical goals. This is not to deny that throughout history, even in the most highly developed personalities, we always encounter relationships and spontaneous affinities. These however are but further evidence on the one hand of the ineluctable dynamism of all art and on the other of the creative artist's power to assimilate the experiences of life around him.


Skeptics should take note of the *Seated Nude* (10) of 1942, in which the skill and nobility of sculptural handling cannot be debated. What does it matter from what source the artist drew inspiration for this and other works, if he has succeeded in elaborating it in such a way as to produce something truly independent and original? Viani's quest for solid plasticity, even if it be the product of much purposeful study, has nothing mechanical about it, for its final outcome is an achievement of intimate self-realization. And this intimacy—or sculptural authenticity—in the completed work of art is clearly recognizable in the regulated harmony of the manner by which the plastic qualities grow out of the masses, and in the accents that articulate and determine the sculpture's sensitive movement, combining fluency of modeling with clarity of the volumes in one harmonious whole.

What Viani has to teach us is perfectly apparent in this work, but we can appreciate it all the more if we follow closely other examples of his accomplishment. In doing so, we become increasingly convinced of the futility of any invidious distinction between representational and non-representational art—as if art could represent anything but itself or was not capable of adapting itself to the most varied developments of shapes and forms. Certainly no great artist has ever denied drawing inspiration from nature; assuredly Klee, Kandinsky, Mondrian, Arp, Brancusi and Laurens never denied it. And Viani, whom shortsighted critics have classed as completely committed to abstraction, reveals a sensuous richness that is diametrically opposed to anything formal or academic. His sensuousness is particularly explicit in the *Seated Nude* already mentioned and continues to develop throughout his subsequent work, so that it may be regarded as one of his distinguishing characteristics. This chaste and delicate sensuousness, like a gentle and serene love, appears for the first time in the standing nudes (6 and 8) of 1942. Noteworthy are the measured proportions of the simple, beautifully balanced, erect oval in the one, and in the other of the trunk which spreads upwards from waist to shoulders and downwards to the thighs in a rippling tremor that defines the entire figure without any necessity



Female Figure (6), 1942, plaster, 31 1/2" high

for specifying its separate parts. We find the same softness in the *Nudes* of 1943 (11 and 12), where we observe underlying the outlines a more complex and asymmetric rhythmic scheme, carried out even through the projections into space. In the Museum of Modern Art's *Female Torso* (15) and the *Nude* (16; see cover) of 1945—echoed by the *Nude* (19) of 1946—the sensuous mood is subordi-



Nude (31), 1951,  
plaster, 47 1/4" high

nate to a more sparse and simplified scheme whose measured regularity is especially apparent in the compactness of the volumes. The abandonment of any naturalistic restraint in these works seems to have achieved a freedom which here successfully combines the tentative statements of a responsible language of form with an inner sensibility that has undergone a mythical transmutation. These two are among Viani's most remarkable productions and are indeed among the most remarkable sculptures of our time. Related to them are the later *Nude* (31) of 1951, which bears certain structural resemblances to the works just discussed and which was anticipated by the *Seated Nude* (21) of 1948 and the slightly earlier *Figure* (30). The 1951 *Nude* is an excellent example of Viani's style, possessing a harmony that is almost Hellenic. Its definite but delicate

curvature, the broad hollow lying between the gentle slope of the breasts and the shoulders, and the widening of the hips over the folded legs, as well as the innumerable points of view all presenting an equally strict accord between graceful curves and swelling volumes, combine to produce an effect so rich that the piece arouses the immediate admiration provoked only by truly great works of art.

A true artist's story is not made up of just one facet of his art—or even, as many critics still persist in believing on the basis of a few exceptional examples, of a series of alternate periods of productivity and withdrawal. It consists, rather, of a continuous process of experimentation in which repeated attempts and exercises gradually pave the way for something new. We should therefore follow every phase of Viani's development step by

Figure (30), 1950, plaster, 67" high



MAY, 1952



Nude (32), 1951, plaster, 51" high

step, going back as far as the delicately tapering *Female Figure* (6) and *Figure* (7) of 1942—the latter an unusual expansion of forms into space in the shape of a four-blade propeller. The closed unity of the block which we find in the *Male Torso*s of 1939 (1) and 1941 (4) recurs ten years later in the *Nude* (32) of 1951, which is the culmination of various preceding experiments—chiefly in effects of tapering. Attempting to trace other sources of this work's inspiration, we seem to find them not so much in the *Figure* (30) of 1950, executed only a short time before, but rather in the two *Nudes* (28 and 29) of 1949 and the *Female Figure* (6) of 1942.

The representational quality of the *Acrobat* (2) places it apart from the main path of Viani's development. Together with the *Nude with Up-raised Arms* (9) of 1942, however, it leads to the *Figure* (7) of 1942, the two *Nudes* (13 and 14) of 1944 and eventually to the larger *Reclining Nude* (27) of 1949—the latter a studied, almost academic, synthesis of the others—and to the *Seated Nude* (21) of 1948, as well as to the two *Standing Nudes* (22 and 23) of the same year. Similar incisions which cut like cruel wounds into the unity of the block are modified and softened in the two *Seated Nudes* (24 and 25) of 1949, already anticipating the *Nude* (26) of the same year and the wonderful *Nude* (31) of 1951. In the former, the unusual disposition of the component parts of the body seems to follow the system of some visionary landscape. The ruthless openings on which the bodies of the two *Standing Nudes* (22 and 23) of 1948 are balanced, as if on absurd crutches, are foreshadowed by the tapering bases of the *Nude with Up-raised Arms* (9) of 1942 and the *Nudes* (11 and 12) of 1943. And certain contrasts between large and small bodies, serving to give scale to the space they occupy, are likewise anticipated in the *Figure* (7) of 1942, the *Nude* (16) of 1945, and the *Nude* (19) and *Figure* (20) of 1946. Even in what Giuseppe Marchiori in his monograph on the artist (*Viani*, Paris, Presses Littéraires de France, 1950) has called his "stylistic antitheses," Viani always remains faithful to his allegiance to rich fancy and his self-imposed task of building up a new contribution to contemporary sculpture, made up of studied imagination and stylistic balance.

In Viani's work, long-established tradition and modern taste join in a lyrical blend of clear, soft imagery. No less worthy of our admiration than his culminating achievements are those intervening moments in which, not satisfied with his own accomplishments, the sculptor turns his energies to inevitably precarious experimentation. At times the consciousness of being steeped in cultural tradition may clip the wings of his inspiration. But he has a fresh eye and a fresh approach to his work, and these enable him time and again to renew the poetry and creative spark which together produce an individual strength. His art is

both part of the general esthetic current of our times and at the same time a testimony to his own independent spiritual life.

In other words, while his roots lie in an inherited civilization, Viani introduces a strikingly original element into his inheritance and endows it with human and poetic significance. His work satisfies us because it transcends the mere imitation of historical traditions to bear convincing witness to his own fertile and lively imagination, infused with human warmth and spiritual fervor.

#### List of Viani's Sculpture

- (1) MALE TORSO, 1939, plaster, 23½" high
- (2) ACROBAT, 1940, plaster, 70" high (destroyed)
- (3) FEMALE FIGURE, 1940, plaster, 33½" high; terracotta, Galleria dello Scorpione, Trieste
- (4) MALE TORSO, 1941, plaster, 23½" high
- (5) MALE TORSO, 1942, plaster, 51" high (destroyed)
- (6) FEMALE FIGURE, 1942, plaster, 31½" high; terracotta, collection Muraro, Venice
- (7) FIGURE, 1942, plaster, 63" long (destroyed)
- (8) STANDING FEMALE FIGURE, 1942, plaster, 63" high
- (9) NUDE WITH UPRAISED ARMS, 1942, plaster, 59" high
- (10) SEATED NUDE, 1942, plaster, 47¼" high, collection Raggianti, Florence; bronze, collection Meneghelli, Johannesburg
- (11) NUDE, 1943, plaster, 51" high
- (12) NUDE, 1943, plaster, 47¼" high; marble, collection Fisch, Milan
- (13) NUDE, 1944, plaster, 59" high
- (14) NUDE, 1944, plaster, 55" high
- (15) FEMALE TORSO, 1944, plaster, 43¾" high; marble, 1945, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- (16) NUDE, 1945, plaster, 47¼" high; marble, collection Meneghelli, Johannesburg
- (17) RECLINING NUDE, 1945, plaster, 67" long
- (18) NUDE, 1946, plaster, 59" high
- (19) NUDE, 1946, plaster, 47¼" high
- (20) FIGURE, 1946, plaster, 55" high
- (21) SEATED NUDE, 1948, plaster, 51" high; marble, collection Cavellini, Brescia
- (22) STANDING NUDE, 1948, plaster, 74¾" high
- (23) STANDING NUDE, 1948, plaster, 63" high
- (24) SEATED NUDE, 1949, plaster, 63" high; marble, 1951, Musée Communal de Sculpture en Plein Air, Antwerp
- (25) SEATED NUDE, 1949, plaster, 47¼" high, collection Gallo, Rome
- (26) NUDE, 1949, plaster, 51" high
- (27) RECLINING NUDE, 1949, plaster, 74¾" long
- (28) NUDE, 1949, plaster, 63" high
- (29) NUDE, 1949, plaster, 67" high
- (30) FIGURE, 1950, plaster, 67" high
- (31) NUDE, 1951, plaster, 47¼" high
- (32) NUDE, 1951, plaster, 51" high

In addition to Marchiori's monograph on Viani mentioned above, those interested may refer to *Sculpture di Alberti Viani*, Milan, Edizione della Spiga, 1946.

Photographs of nos. 6 and 10, Osvaldo Böhm, Venice; all others Interfoto, Venice.

Nicolas Poussin, *Funeral of Phocion*, 1648, Louvre, Paris



## THE LATE-BAROQUE IMAGE: POUSSIN AND RACINE

*Wylie Sypher*

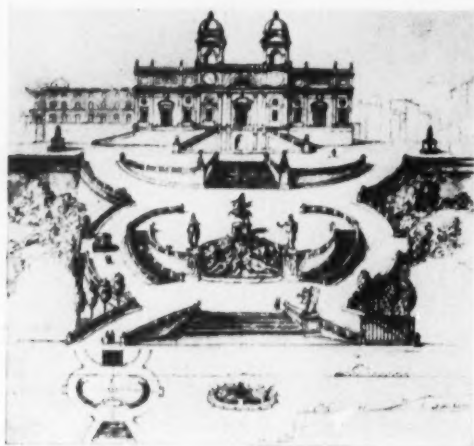
DURING the seventeenth century the high-baroque reached its climax in Rome, where the Counter Reformation achieved its full catharsis in dynamic masses and volumes, in the glories of the flesh, in exhibitions of pomp in heaven and earth. The high-baroque arts gave themselves to material splendors. Yet we must agree with Denis Mahon that there is no inherent contradiction between the high-baroque "gigantic excelsior" (as Pevsner describes it) and the generous forms in painting and architecture we have usually called "academic," since the academic seems implicit in the massive and abandoned baroque display. We must, however, note that after the high-baroque triumph in Rome, the axis of the arts swung north and was stabilized during the latter seventeenth century in the vicinity of Paris, where newly founded academies of painting and literature were carrying on their "conversations." If the French never produced an extravagant baroque, nevertheless the Parisian academies found many of their standards—their "judicious" standards—among the baroque performances in Rome. "The best of the French School, Poussin, Le Sueur, and Le Brun," wrote Sir Joshua Reynolds, "may be said to be a colony from the Roman school." And as for the

more judicious British artists of the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, many like Wren and Dryden and Reynolds himself were a kind of Parisian colony in London: "Critic learning," admitted Pope, "flourished most in France." In fact, a certain baroque tradition—sometimes called "academism" or "neo-classicism"—works itself out through Domenichino, Poussin, Le Brun, J. H. Mansart and Wren, and, in literature, through "heroic" dramas by Corneille and Dryden, through Reynolds' *Discourses*, through Johnson's "regular" tragedy *Irene*.

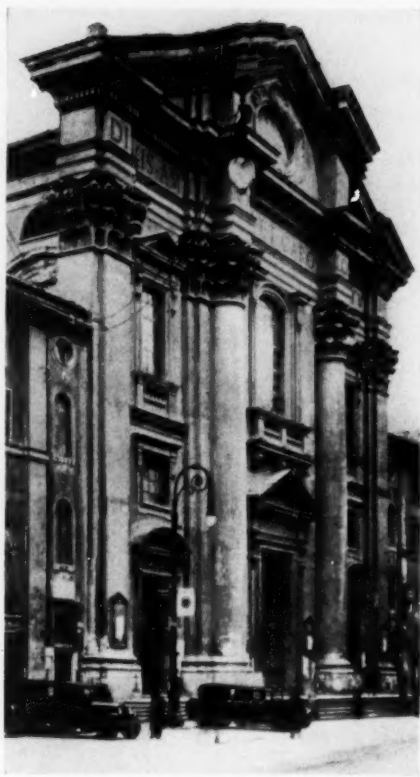
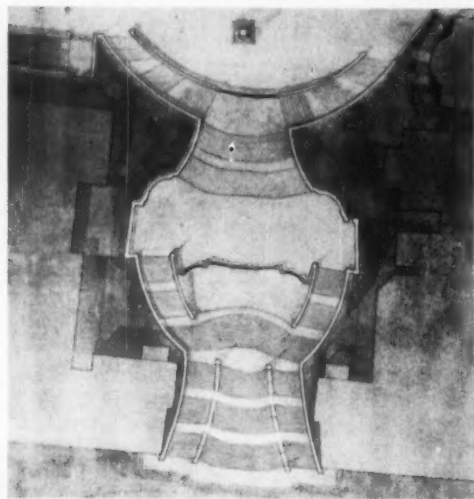
Sometimes art-historians—Pevsner among them—give their own name to this tradition, this curious residue of heroic painting, architecture and sculpture. For them, it is "late-baroque." The term is better than "academic" or "neo-classical" or "Augustan" since it indicates both the origin and the course of this tradition, which runs through literature as well as the other arts. The literary historians have long debated how far this academic or neo-classical practice, as found in Boileau, for example, is indebted to "rationalism" (or Cartesianism, as it is often known, for this was the century that produced Descartes and his mathematical method). Joan Evans gives an

answer to their debate: this kind of art is not rationalist, she says; rather, it has an instinct for "psychological symmetry." I should like to suggest that late-baroque is really nothing less than a *psychological reconstruction of baroque mass, flesh, volume and gesture*. Poussin and Racine, supreme artists in this tradition, purify baroque by a certain late-baroque psychology, *which amounts to a style*.

In his book on *Roman Baroque Art*, Fokker suggests that late-baroque used a counterpoise or exaggerated contrast of forces that often makes the painted figure in Giacinto Brandi or sculptured one in the later Bernini assume an "attitude." In late-baroque there are symmetrical counter-move-



Alessandro Specchi and Francesco de Sanctis, Spanish Steps, Rome, early 18th century. Above: Anonymous sketch; below: plan (from T. H. Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, London, 1938)



Cardinal Omodei, Façade, S. Carlo al Corso, Rome, 1690

ments within "closed" boundaries, as appear in the Spanish Steps in Rome—a structure showing how late-baroque reorganizes, redirects and balances the energies of high-baroque. This reorganization passes through a "heroic" phase when there is a good deal of bombast in plays by Dryden or Corneille, or in Roman façades like S. Carlo al Corso, with its overstatement, its "bulky and contrasting masses" which yet are "contained" within symmetrical giant orders. Thus the ample late-baroque forms seem to be managed with an air of "judgment" gained chiefly through oppositions, balances and reversals of forces, which may be very energetic indeed.

This sort of reorganization of baroque, emphasizing the control of judgment and symmetry, occurs in Poussin, who, as Félibien says, returned to Domenichino for his "strong expression" and "attitudes" but who always worked within "just bounds." Roger Fry must have meant this when he said that Poussin "accepts the frame" and "closes" his composition. *The Funeral of Phocion* (1648) has this late-baroque psychological stability: the masses are dense and balanced, the rhythms are firm and measured, the forms inhabit a landscape where the generous material world is disciplined into a clear order by being half-



Nicolas Poussin, *Shepherds in Arcadia*, 1638-39, Louvre, Paris

generalized with a kind of statement we find in Dr. Johnson's verses. The plastic values are used to indicate psychological relationships, and these psychological relationships are determined by what Sir Joshua Reynolds calls "the internal fabric of the mind," the "sense of congruity, coherence, and consistency which is a real existing principle in man."

The world of Poussin conforms to the internal fabric of the mind: its conformity is not rationalist or Cartesian, but a psychology of balance, equivalence and symmetry, and a reconstruction of baroque materials according to an inherent principle of congruence, coherence and consistency. So also in the contemporary drama, the academic "unities" were bringing the baroque image under another dispensation than the full-baroque release: the image in both drama and painting retains, as its baroque heritage, its grandiose proportions and gestures, but it is set in another world, in more regular intervals, in a more formal and metrical space or "scene." We see what happens in Poussin's famous *Shepherds in Arcadia* (1638-39) where the four great figures, their attitudes quoted, without overstatement, from Domenichino or Titian, rest in simple equation, two and two, one standing, one bending, on each side of the sarcophagus with its inscription ET IN ARCADIA EGO. The trunks on the right bracket

the group, as do the mountains and the two trees, repeated in minor accents, on the left. The space falls away in adjacent planes to the rocky hills, which shut in the composition by their blue and jagged profiles, gently mounting towards two major accents. Over the head of the bending shepherd on the right, almost in the center, falls the caesura—a space between rocks and trees. The four great figures are ample in their heroic but formal scale. The focus of their energy—a point of moral intersection within this pastoral drama—is determined by the two gracious hands, from left and right, pointing to the inscription on the pitiless stone.

Their gestures indicate their moods: resignation, surprise, curiosity, melancholy. Louis Hourticq remarks that each of Poussin's compositions is a pantomime fixed at its most expressive moment. The *Massacre of the Innocents* (1629) is a horrible pantomime where each figure is caught at the instant of psychological crisis, the modes of this crisis being expressed in the attitudes of the actors: the executioner savagely raising his sword above the infant, the face of the mother a rigid mask, a second mother departing with a gesture of despair. The violence is baroque, but the action has, again, a point of moral intersection, and is arrested, academically, in each of the figures, who serve as anatomical machines to

portray a mode of feeling.

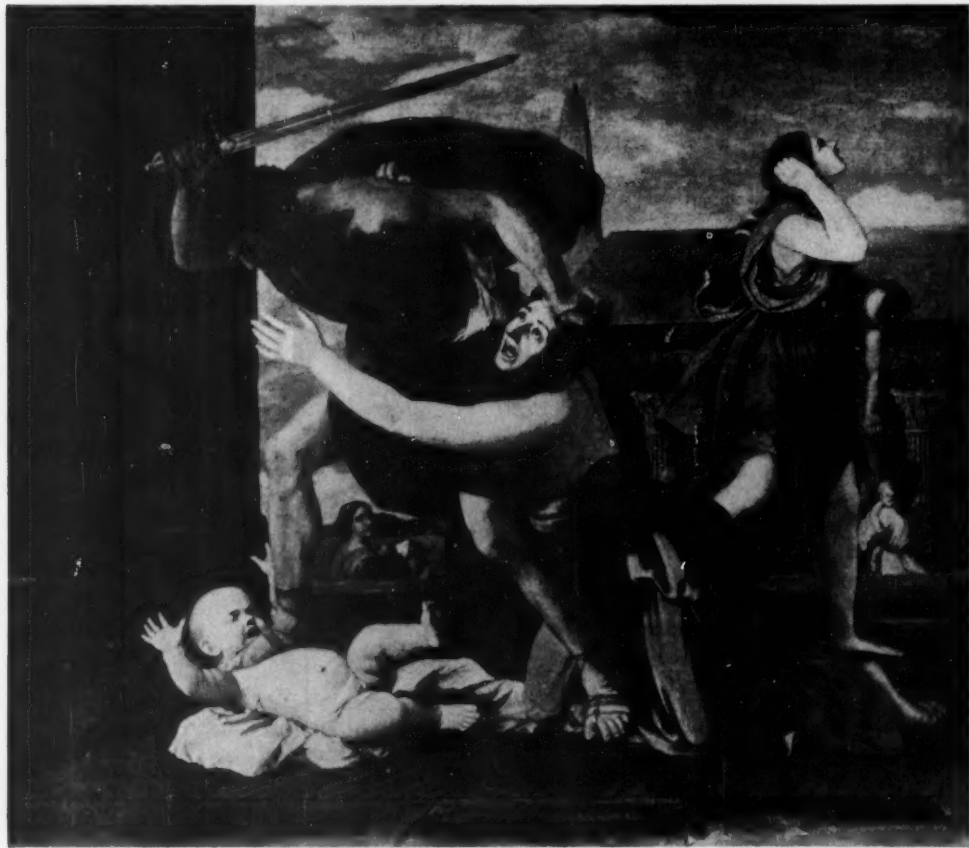
These baroque images have become "expressive" in a new way, by means of a late-baroque formula for behavior that literary critics have called simply "decorum" without denoting the complicated mechanism involved. I use the word mechanism, for here we meet one of the genuinely Cartesian contributions to late-baroque, though the late-baroque psychological symmetry and counterpoise is not directly indebted to Cartesian rationalism. To explain the attitudes in Poussin's paintings, the late-baroque critics utilized a theory of the *mechanics* of passion (we can hardly call it a psychology) that Descartes developed in his *Passions of the Soul* (1649). In writing this treatise Descartes must have drawn upon earlier anatomies of passion like Coeffeteau's *Table of Human Passions* (1621) or treatises on the humors and their expression. (The British theatre was already using a mechanistic or "Jacobean" psychology in plays by Beaumont and Fletcher and others.)

This adoption of a Cartesian mechanism of passion is better understood by art historians than by literary historians, who have at times miscon-

ceived the late-baroque *anatomy* of "decorum." Boileau, who is no Cartesian, advises the poet: "Clothe differing passions in a differing dress." In his *Art of Painting* Du Fresnoy urges the painter, "You are to express the emotions of the spirits, and the affections or passions whose center is the heart: in a word, *to make the soul visible*." The French academicians, of course, found in the *Laocoön* group a pure mechanism of "expression." Late-baroque or academic passion was not only a mode of action according to a code, as it was in the heroic play by Corneille and Dryden; it was also a physiology. The late-baroque dispensation brought the high-baroque image under the law of the fabric of mind, the law of coherence within a scene, and also the law of passion expressed mechanically by feature, gesture and pose.

In prescribing the "attitudes" in painting, Le Brun, Testelin and the other academic critics accepted Descartes' anatomy of passion. For Descartes, the seat of the soul is the pineal gland, which controls the machine of the body through the filaments of the nerves, which in turn are agitated when the spirits move this little gland. There

Nicolas Poussin, *Massacre of the Innocents*, 1629, Musée Condé, Chantilly





Charles Le Brun, *The Expressions* (from *Traité des Passions*, Paris, 1698)

are six chief passions: wonder, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness; the others are composite. The definitions of passions are neat: hatred is an emotion caused by spirits inciting the soul to be separated from hurtful objects; love is the opposite. These passions express themselves physiologically by signs in the features, and particularly by the eyes. In discourse after discourse Le Brun and the academicians sought to "read" Poussin according to this mechanism of expression. Le Brun illustrated his *Treatise on the Passions* (1698) with drawings of the features during fear, contemplation, laughter, astonishment, disdain, despair, inquietude, grief—since "expression marks the true character of each thing." The passions, he says, produce bodily action, and action is the motion of muscles caused by the ends of nerves; and the nerves are moved by spirits contained in the cavities of the brain; and the brain receives its spirits from the blood, which passes through the heart. Thus, anger is a mechanism of response expressed by redness of the eyes, a wandering pupil, the eyebrows lowered or raised, the forehead creased, the nostrils wide open, the underlip pushed over the upper; the face is swollen, the veins of forehead and neck bulge, the hair bristles. Rage and despair may follow anger. (So, also, in Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe*, Nourmahal rushes in like an academic figure: "Her brows the stormy marks of anger bear").

Testelin furnishes an even more complete mechanism in a lecture given in 1675: the passions of the soul appear in the actions of the whole body, the elevation of the brows, the contour of the lips, the pose of the torso, the position of the feet. Aversion brings a recoil of the body, with the arms repulsing the object; horror produces a similar gesture, but more violent. In love the eyes are half closed, the lips red and humid. There are also "attitudes" for laughter, fear, desire, timidity, melancholy. As usual, Testelin appends a Table of Precepts for Expression, with a formula for each major passion. He decides that angels cannot bear the marks of sensuality; and the veins of the gods do not swell. The nose, adds De Piles, "has no passion particular to it." In 1720 Coypel is still speaking the same language, specifying the appropriate gestures for each social rank. Even the eighteenth-century actor could assume various "attitudes" with "the most surprising velocity," as Davies said of Garrick.

Thus the plastic baroque image has become a "machine" to express an attitude or imperative of the soul. Poussin having used this idiom, the academies then developed the paradigms, with full inflections. If the passions of the late-baroque image are not rationalist or Cartesian, surely this image moves with Cartesian *gestures*. Its modes of action are described in Descartes' treatise.

Félibien, speaking of Poussin, says, "Among the essential and most considerable aspects of painting is expression . . . ; the painter intends to vary his scene by different movements of the soul as well as by gestures of the body."

Racine employs these movements of the soul, these gestures. The late-baroque psychology provided him his diagram of forces, his reversals of will, his dialectic of passion, his conflict of imperatives; and Descartes had invented for him a machine of feature and attitude. It remained for Racine to free the structure and the action of late-baroque from its grossness, its automatism and externality, to reduce the late-baroque drama to its ultimate formal contour.

We appreciate Racine, as we appreciate Poussin, only if we abandon talk about classicism and academism and regard them as the unique, the culminating achievement of late-baroque sensibility. Then we feel Racine's force, his rarity, his transposing life into a naked conflict of impulses expressed by a logic of passion. Like Poussin, Racine liberates the baroque image from its plastic excess; we have left only its visage, its attitude, its idiom for expressing the will of the self. Like Poussin, Racine refuses to solicit our interest by the external means of the scene. Racine's representation of the world is a "disposition" of human actions. There also he resembles Poussin, who says that a painting is an "idea"—"if it portrays bodies, it represents only the order and the mode of the species of things." Racine operates, too, at a full and pure theatrical velocity, unencumbered.

Every Racinian action is organized into a late-baroque play of forces that a painter would call double *contrapposto*, since the impulses "oscillate" between poles. This oscillation is a logic of dilemma. The essential structure of Racine's actions is suggested in the title of his first play, *Les Frères Ennemis*—the impossible strife at Thebes where Polynices opposes Eteocles his brother in a situation so tightly "closed" that only alternative responses are possible, without concessions. These dynamic alternatives have their most direct and savage force in *Andromaque*, where the widow of Hector is wooed by Pyrrhus, slayer of Hector; and Hermione, the daughter of Helen, is wooed by Orestes, but loves Pyrrhus. The key, unseen figure, the invisible axis of the closed situation, where all the terms are known and there is only the logic of mutually exclusive responses, is the boy Astyanax, son of Hector, protected by Andromache but held in the charge of Pyrrhus; Orestes has come to seize him for the Greeks. At once Pylades realizes the double course open to Pyrrhus, scorning Hermione, himself scorned by Andromache:

... he may choose to marry  
Her whom he scorns, and lose the one he loves.

And Orestes defines Hermione's position: "She who scorned me—she herself is scorned." For her



Illustration for *Andromaque*, engraved by Chauveau for the 1676 edition of Racine

part Hermione feels the bitter duplicity of her passion for Pyrrhus: "He was too dear not to be hated now." Here is the late-baroque psychological symmetry, like the symmetries in Poussin: the forces and characters precisely confronted, the motives swinging from love to hate, each person occupying the position of the other as each in turn knows hope and despair. The moral imperatives are strictly commensurate. Hermione, Pyrrhus, Orestes do not know whether they love or hate; and after Andromache has wedded Pyrrhus, after Orestes has for the love (and hate) of Hermione killed Pyrrhus, Andromache assumes, as widow of the slain Greek, the honorable duty of avenging her husband, who in sacking Troy had killed her first husband. The irony in these reversals is a major irony, the irony of extremes that exclude each other, and is clarified by the contradictions in both situation and psychic forces.

It is the same in *Iphigénie*. It is the same in *Phèdre*, torn between her duty to her husband and her illicit love for her son. Here the full inconsistency, the impossible dilemma of the human situation, caught between contraries, is forced to a moral crisis when the total consciousness and the total fate of man are "engaged," to use Racine's term. This is a late-baroque reduction of composition to a few powerful forces, concentrated, as

Maulnier states, into an "interior" conflict with an effect of a "chosen" fatality.

Thus Racine, like Poussin, purifies the baroque image of all its coarseness; he formalizes its behavior, its responses, its features without sacrificing its violence. The tensions remain, after the tragic conflict of life is reduced to an almost theoretic design of forces without diminishing the psychic immediacy of these forces. Malcolm Cowley has written that a tragedy by Racine is stylized until it becomes almost an abstract painting of an emotion, possessing a formal value. Poussin must have meant something like this when he said that painting is "nothing but an idea of incorporeal things." For Poussin is as formal in his disposition as Racine, in his late-baroque equation of gesture, in his theatrical visage, his expressive velocity.

After the high-baroque confidence in the flesh, its assertion of plastic mass, Racine, Poussin and the late-baroque artists discipline the drama of the flesh, transpose the baroque masses into moral energies. Racine writes *Bérénice* as a feat of "purity" very proper to the theatre because of the "intensity of the passions it can excite." Concerning this play he explains that tragedy does not need the tumult of blood and death; it is enough if the action be great, if the actors be heroic, if the passions be excited. The five acts of *Bérénice* are merely a repeated collision of imperatives as to whether Titus shall sacrifice his love for his mistress in order to do his duty to Rome. Some believe, Racine explains, that this simplicity of action is a want of ingenuity; but such persons do not consider that a spectacular action is only an evasion. So he writes *Bérénice*, a pure and expressive fabric of the mind.

The baroque with its splendid pomps, with its Counter Reformation worship of great images, had ended in the most vulgar of all literal deceptions—the image with false hair, glass eyes and every texture of actuality. Renouncing each vulgar deception and evidence of actuality, Racine and Poussin mount their late-baroque action in all its purity as a stylized encounter of forces expressed by a theatrical mechanism of passion. For the décor in Racine is, as Le Bidois notes, the human figure itself, its attitudes, its postures, its visage. The features of the actor are an aspect of Racine's "elocution" of the soul; and the voice of the actor is the voice of the soul arriving at its decision, which is its fate. Maulnier says that Racine transposes humanity into language. Indeed, Racine refuses the texture of the actual world and retains only the expression of imperatives within the self. Thus his plays are a mode of elocution. The very motions of Phèdre's soul are audible in Phèdre's language, which is a style of action as well as a discourse:

*C'est peu de t'avoir fui, cruel, je t'ai chassé;  
J'ai voulu te paraître odieuse, inhumaine;  
Pour mieux te résister, j'ai recherché ta haine.*

Racine does not need, nor does Poussin, the high-baroque magnificence and décor; these late-baroque artists leave us only the dramatic features and the dramatic language.

As Racine "closed" his theatre by the limits of the mind, so Poussin closed his pictorial world, which obeys the late-baroque psychological law of "congruity, coherence, and consistency"—which, says Reynolds, "is a real existing principle in man." And, he adds, "It must be satisfied." The late-baroque satisfied this need for self-determination, for the values of a controlled psychological order, more completely than any art until cubism. Today, Valéry has asked us, "What is more mysterious than clarity?" Wallace Stevens repeats, "The imagination is the only genius. It is intrepid and eager, and the extreme of its achievement lies in abstraction. . . . We live in the mind."

To continue in the same direction: Félibien said of Poussin, "The light which illumined his thoughts was uniform, pure and without clouds." This is the achievement of late-baroque; to shed over the world the light of the mind, to reduce life to the inward equation, not the fleshly or the spectacular. Racine and Poussin reconstruct the world into the fabric of consciousness: their scene is a naked appearance of human action, a resolution of tension by discourse, by a mode of expression, by an "attitude" assumed.

Illustration for *Athalie*, engraved by Sébastien Leclerc after a design by Charles Lebrun for the 1691 edition of Racine



# PIET MONDRIAN: 1914-18

*Michel Seuphor*

**I**N July, 1914, Mondrian, who had been living in Paris since 1912, was recalled to Holland to his father's bedside. Closing the Kickert studio in Montparnasse and taking with him only what he would need for a short trip, he set out like the good son he was.

Throughout his youth Mondrian had fought inwardly tooth and nail against his father's ascendancy. Perhaps it was in reaction against this rigid Calvinist that he came to feel so spontaneous a sympathy for the Catholic peasants of Brabant. Theosophy, likewise, was first of all a means of escaping the paternal influence. "Mondrian Senior," van den Briel, who had met Piet's father several times at the beginning of the century, remarked to me, "was a sententious man, of icy mien, who imposed on everyone a will that no one dared cross. In outward manner he was frankly disagreeable."

Resembling his father only in tenacity, Piet must have suffered not a little from this authoritarian character. He himself was approachable in the extreme—very attentive to the ideas of others, rather silent, and always deferential in discussion. He was given to expressions like: "doesn't it seem . . . ?," "don't you think . . . ?," "on reflection, it might very well be . . .," and he was not readily swayed from his habitual amiability.

Perhaps he was thinking of his father—but with a view to contradicting him—when, towards 1909, he jotted down in his notebook:

"Good and evil, the beautiful and the ugly—these are only appearances. One says, 'If men were better, this or that wouldn't have happened.' But man is what he is, however essential goodness may be. If he is 'good,' that's fine; if he is 'bad,' that's simply because he is lazy and backward.

"Evolution goes slowly."

Mondrian had not been long with his father at Arnhem after his return and had scarcely found time to see a few friends in Amsterdam, when the war broke out. Belgium was invaded, rail connections with Paris were cut off, and Mondrian found



*Church Façade, 1914, oil, 25 1/4 x 15 1/4", collection Harry Holtzman, New York*

himself stranded in Holland. After some hesitation he decided to return to Paris by way of England. Had he not left in Paris the only works of his that now had meaning for him? But his friends and family protested strongly against his going by sea and ended by convincing him. So Mondrian spent the entire four years and four months of the war's duration in Holland. As soon as the armistice was signed, he left for Paris on one of the first trains to be put into service. He found his studio and canvases intact. But during the intervening years, he had come such a long way that the paintings of 1913 and 1914 now were almost as strange to him in 1918 as those done in Zeeland and Brabant had seemed at the moment of his return to Holland. Really he no longer belonged to his own country. He did not fit into any group. One could no longer place his paintings alongside those of Sluyters, of Toorop or even of van Dongen—although the latter had lived for a long time in Paris. The great cubist broom had swept all that away.

During his enforced stay in Holland, however, Mondrian nevertheless returned to Domburg as to an old love. He had many friends there, among others Toorop. There were especially women friends, including some who had been his pupils: Jacoba van Heemskerck and her sister, Mlle de Sitter, Toorop's daughter Charley, Mme Elout-Drabbe (who in 1915 was to paint a remarkable portrait of Mondrian), and finally Mlle Tak van Poortvliet, then a famous collector, who owned a beautiful estate near Domburg.

But his best friend was the sea. If he found it unchanged, had not his own vision altered during the past three years? The sea is not visible from the village itself. But when one scales the dunes, it suddenly appears, with its immense expanse of pink sand cut at long intervals by double rows of black pilings set up as breakwaters, opposing their static intervals to the moving rhythm of the waves. Mondrian loved the sea. It was doubtless for this reason that he went so soon to Domburg and let himself be persuaded to remain in Holland. The one desire he expressed at the end of his life (as we know from the unpublished journal of Charmion von Wiegand) was to see the ocean again.

So it was in Domburg in 1914 that he began the long series of drawings in which he tried to interpret the rhythm of the sea. They were accompanied by jottings in his notebook, which are of capital importance for the understanding of his work. These concise thoughts, hastily scribbled down in pithy, often abbreviated words, were the point of departure for the important essays he was later to publish in *De Stijl*. They have the merit of being very simple and clear. Not the aphorisms of a literary man dying to be original, they are rather the results, the findings—however provisional—of a man passionately seeking a solid intellectual foundation for life as well as for art. One may judge this from the following extracts (translated from the Dutch) drawn from two illustrated notebooks belonging to Mr. Harry Holtzman:

"Two roads lead to the spiritual: the road of doctrinal teaching, of direct exercise (meditation, etc.), and the slow but certain road of evolution. One sees in art the slow growth of spirituality, of which the artists themselves are unconscious.

"The conscious path of doctrinal teaching, in art, leads most often to degeneration. When the two roads go together—that is to say, when the artist finds himself on the exact level of development where conscious and direct spiritual activity becomes possible, then we are in the presence of ideal art."

"Each man, each object, everything in this world has its reason for being. Everything is beautiful, everything is good, everything is necessary, each object and every being has its relative and appropriate value.

"In the same way, all art is valid. All activity occurs at a certain stage of life and within a certain time. But the stages of life do not dovetail perfectly. Hence inequality (only apparent) and mutual incomprehension.

"What captivated us at first does not hold us afterwards (like toys). If one has loved the surfaces of things for a long time, one will finally look for something more. This "more," however, is already present in the surface one wants to go beyond. Through the surface one sees the inner side of things; it is as we regard the surface that the inward image takes shape in our souls. This is the image we are to represent. For the natural surface of things is beautiful, but the imitation of this surface is lifeless. Things give us everything; their representations give us nothing."

"*Art and reality.* Art is above every reality, has no direct relation with reality. Between the spheres of the physical and of the ether is a frontier which our senses cannot cross. Nevertheless the ether penetrates the physical and acts upon it. Similarly the spiritual [*geestelijke*; later crossed out and replaced by *artistieke*—'artistic'] sphere penetrates reality. But for our senses the spiritual and the material are two different things. To approach the spiritual in art, one will use as little of reality as possible, for reality is opposed to the spiritual. Thus the use of elementary forms is quite logical. Since these forms are abstract, we find ourselves confronted by an art that is abstract."

"The positive and the negative are the cause of all actions. They bring about the loss of immobility, that is to say of happiness. They are the cause of eternal, vertiginous movement and of successive change. They are the reason why happiness in time is impossible.

"The positive and the negative are responsible for the sundering of unity; they cause all misfortune.

"The union of the positive and the negative is happiness. So that the more the positive and the negative are united in a person, the happier will he be. In the artist this is very evident. He is both masculine and feminine. Since he is not purely masculine, he is at a distance from the positive physical pole. On the other hand, he is closer to the positive psychic pole."

"Art, being superhuman, cultivates the superhuman element in man and hence has become a means for humanity's evolution, of equal importance with religion.

"On the other hand, realistic-naturalistic art is an amusement for men in their consideration of human things, and the beauty we admire in this domain is not much more beautiful than what we see with human eyes. This art has nevertheless its reason for existing, for those to whom it is addressed are not all equally human. The artist by intuition sees things much more spiritually than



Above: Dunes, oil, Zeeland Period, 55 x 94 1/2", collection S. B. Slipper, Blaricum



Left: The Dunes, 1908, pencil, 4 x 6 1/2", collection Charmion von Wiegand, New York, photograph Aaron Siskind

Blue Tree,  
1910, oil, 27 1/2 x 39",  
Gemeente Museum,  
Amsterdam



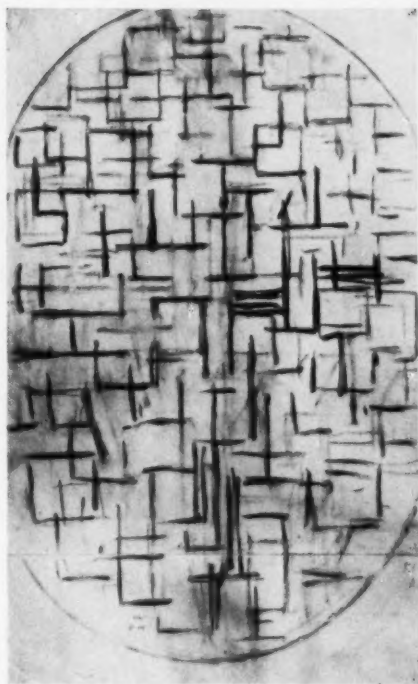
do ordinary men. That is why the reality he sees is more beautiful, and for the same reason art is a boon to ordinary men."

At Domburg, and during the winter, in Amsterdam at Ringdijk 55, Mondrian continued his "abstractions" of church façades and his abstract compositions in light tones—paintings in which the dominant grays orchestrate the soberly set down pinks and blues. There are also compositions in which browns and ochres are dominant. But his principal study in 1914-15 was always the sea. "Seeing the sea, sky and stars, I represented this through a multiplicity of crosses. I was impressed by the greatness of nature and tried to express expansion, rest, unity. For this reason, perhaps, an art critic called one of these pictures *Christmas*. But I felt that I still worked like an impressionist and expressed a particular feeling, not reality as it is" (*Towards the True Vision of Reality*; original manuscript made available by Charmion von Wiegand). Here Mondrian is in complete accord with Cézanne: "For an impressionist to paint from nature is not to paint the objective, but to realize and render his sensations."

One can clearly follow the slow evolution of the theme of the sea between 1909 and 1915. First come the still naturalistic drawings done from the top of a dune (one could almost say from exactly what spot), with the perspective of the beach where the breakwaters, spaced at irregular intervals, trace as many horizontal black lines and, composed themselves in vertical strokes, seem in the play of the perspective which renders them compact like a little forest advancing into the sea. A diagram in Mondrian's notebook explains his meaning clearly. The line of the horizon symbolizes rest; the lines of the black stakes, forming irregular horizontals, "are not in repose, but indicate its direction." This direction is the continuation of the short vertical line of the stakes up to the point where they cross the line of the horizon, the right angle thus obtained giving the image its complete repose. Thus the masculine and the feminine, the material and spiritual elements, form the unity of the whole.

During Mondrian's stay in Paris the theme of the sea was abandoned, though in a certain sense it can be discerned in his façades and structures. Such subjects led him to the same affirmation of the vertical-horizontal rhythm. But as soon as he returned to Domburg in 1914, he took up the motive once more in a direct way in a series of broader drawings, where at first the horizontal dominates. Then the vertical regains its rights and tends to be more strongly emphasized, advancing to the center from the lower part of the composition. The idea of this crystallization of the vertical was suggested by the Scheveningen pier, now destroyed. The resulting image takes us back to the tree theme which occupied Mondrian earlier.

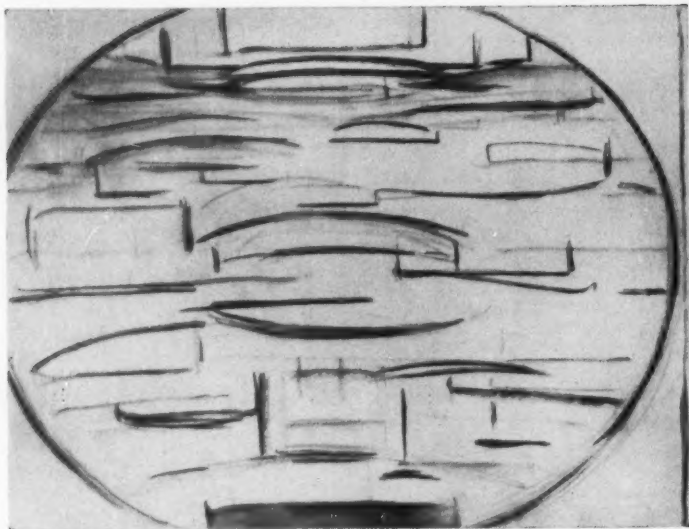
When this series of strange seascapes is crowned by the large drawing of 1914, now in the



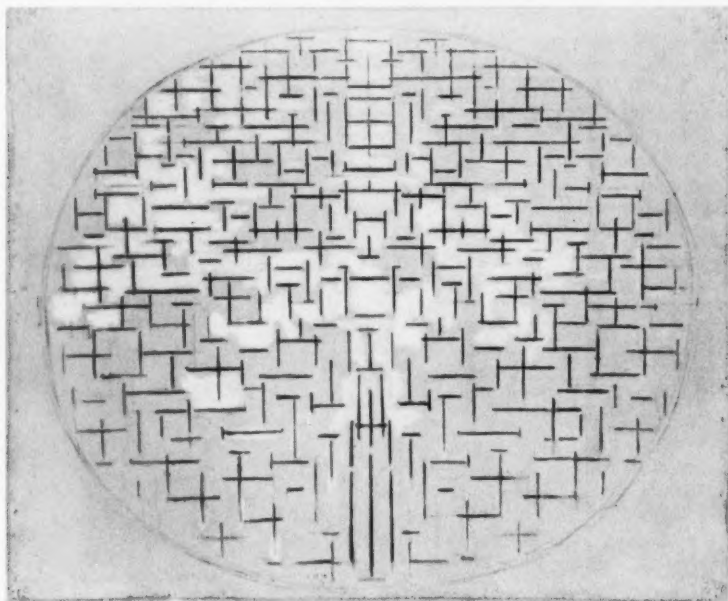
Trees, 1914, charcoal, 31 x 20",  
collection Lucie Glarner, New York

The Tree, 1913, oil, 37 x 28",  
collection Charmion von Wiegand, New York,  
photograph Aaron Siskind





Sea, 1913, charcoal, 36 x 27",  
Sidney Janis Gallery,  
photograph Oliver Baker



Pier and Ocean (Domburg),  
1914, crayon with wash,  
34 1/2 x 44",  
Museum of Modern Art

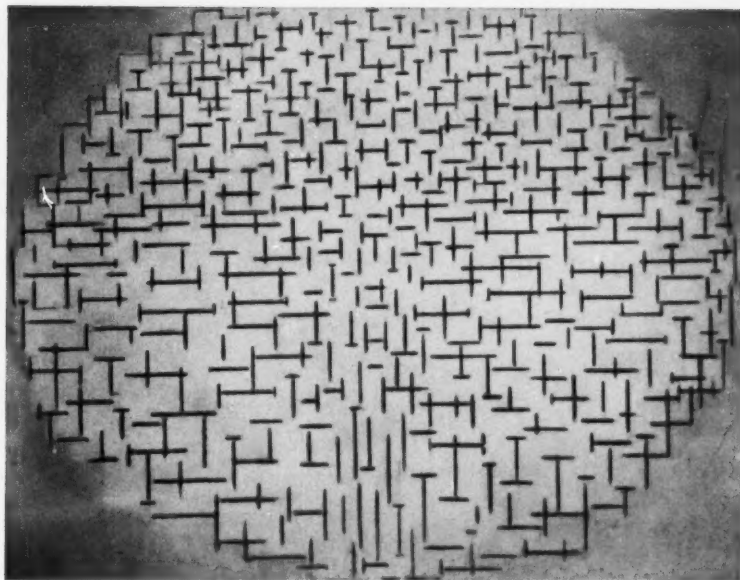
Museum of Modern Art, and by the paintings of 1915 in the Kröller-Müller Museum, we are ushered into the presence of a calm and mysterious majesty, encompassing and protecting—an incredible outburst. This sea, so cerebral, yet so living, makes me think of the verses at the beginning of Valéry's *Cimetière marin*:

*Midi le juste y compose de feux  
La mer, la mer, toujours recommencée!  
O récompense après une pensée  
Qu'un long regard sur le calme des dieux!*

("Equable noon there forms and quells with fires  
The sea, the sea, always begun anew.  
What recompense for having had a thought  
To gaze for a long time on the calm of the gods!")

Painter and poet are here equally modern, equally classical, equally Greek.

In 1916 at The Hague, Mondrian made the acquaintance of van der Leek, and shortly afterwards the two painters met again at Laren, a village some twenty miles from Amsterdam, much frequented by artists. Mondrian had been there several times before. "He used to go to Laren to



Composition, 1915,  
oil, 33½ x 39¼",  
Kröller-Müller Museum,  
Otterlo, photograph Atrequin

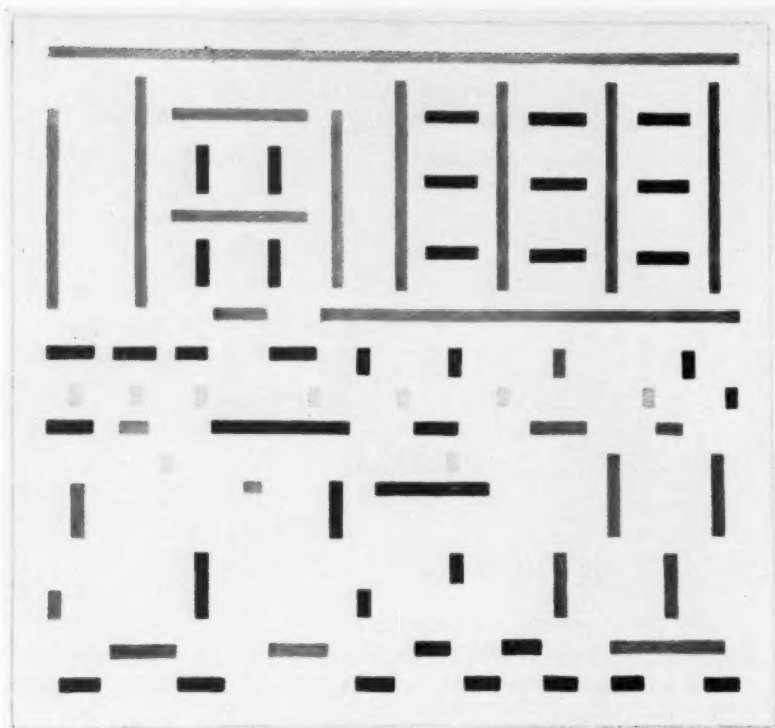
paint," his brother Carel told me, "and rented a room in the Pijlsteeg." As a matter of fact, he stayed with his friend van Domselaer, took his meals at the home of a Mme Hannaert—a faithful admirer he had known before—and for his work had a little studio halfway between Laren and Blaricum. He went often to Blaricum, especially on Sundays, to visit S. B. Slijper, with whom he formed a long-lasting and firm friendship. "We had lots of guests at the farm on Sundays," Mme Slijper relates, "particularly young folk. Piet would enjoy dancing with a pretty girl but never took part in the excitement for very long. He would disappear; and I would almost always find him sitting quietly in a corner of my back kitchen, far from the din. He came to lunch almost every Sunday, always bringing us something by way of a gift—a drawing or sketch."

He also went frequently to van der Leek's—"almost every evening," the latter has told me—to discuss painting. I have never been able to understand van der Leek's influence on Mondrian. The painting of the former is cold, completely external, picture-postcardish and often cruel and without feeling. Mondrian's art, on the other hand, had long been oriented towards the inner essence of things. He was sensitive in the extreme and given to conciliating all opposing forces. His vision of the world was wholly spiritual, that of van der Leek anecdotal and trivial. But the facts cannot be denied. In a fragment written in 1931, Mondrian relates how he met van der Leek, "who, while still representational, painted in unified planes and pure colors. My technique, more or less cubist, hence more or less pictorial,

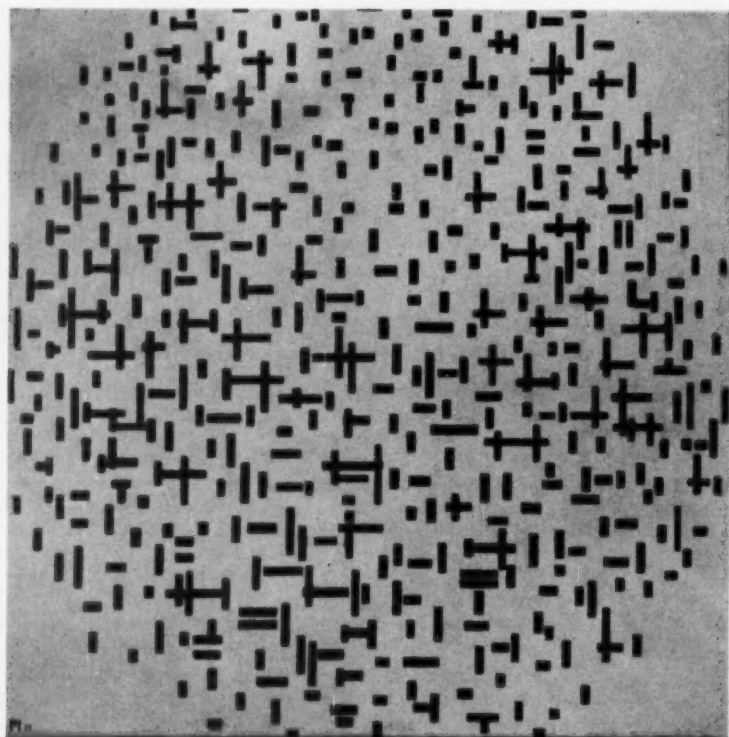
underwent the influence of his exact technique" (*De Stijl*, last issue, testimonial to van Doesburg, January, 1932).

Thus it was while in contact with van der Leek that Mondrian began to paint in flat surfaces and to make use of rectangular planes of pure color. This appears in two small paintings done in 1917 and now in the Kröller-Müller Museum, and in the large black-and-white painting of that year also in the same museum. On the other hand, it seems that Mondrian's example led van der Leek to abandon naturalism completely. This change, which in the case of van der Leek was the result of external influence and did not, as with Mondrian, correspond to some deep intention, could only be ephemeral. After 1918 the figure reappears in van der Leek's work, although it is true that henceforth it was to be highly schematized and sometimes barely recognizable.

One day in 1916 or 1917 came a heartening surprise for Mondrian. He hastened to acquaint his friend Slijper of this in a letter: "The art critic Bremmer probably saw my canvas in Amsterdam, for I have just received a letter from him. He writes me, among other things: 'Your activity and your efforts evoke my sympathy, and I respect and esteem your work. I assume from the nature of your painting that you cannot be free from material difficulties. If such be the case, I should like to make a proposition which might be of some help to you. I propose to send you six hundred florins a year in monthly instalments of fifty florins. In exchange, I propose that you reserve for me four works, preferably not too large, for example no more than 30 by 24 inches.' Now



Van der Leek,  
Composition, 1917



Mondrian,  
Composition, 1917,  
oil, 42 1/2" square,  
Kröller-Müller Museum,  
Otterlo

don't you find that really handsome? At least this will mean a little security, enough to let me go on working. And if he pushes my work, that will be useful in the future. So I have accepted."

H. P. Bremmer, critic of Dutch art and a distinguished lecturer, was the personal advisor of Mme H. Kröller-Müller. It was under his almost exclusive guidance that she formed the famous collection which in 1937 became the National Kröller-Müller Museum, situated in the woods of the Dutch National Park of Hooze Veluwe.

Alas! savage jealousies, aided by gossip, entered the scene, to such a point that in 1918, soon after his return to Paris, Mondrian was notified that his agreement with Bremmer was terminated. Without a single word of explanation, he suddenly found himself deprived of the slender support on which he had greatly relied.

In a letter to Sluiter this passage appears: "Since you wrote me that you are so melancholy, I must write to you again. Externally speaking, I lack vivacity, but as you must have noticed I have an inner liveliness. One feels this more easily when in my company than in a letter. But perhaps something can make itself felt just the same. As you know, I have had some very bad moments, and not a few of them—but no, you really don't know much about that—but I have always come through with inner humor. Thus the bitterest disappointments have never been able to make me unhappy, in spite of everything."

Only once again, in 1923, after having received a letter pleading Mondrian's cause, did Bremmer consent to buy a small painting by him for the Kröller-Müller collection. For van der Leek, however, regular aid was never lacking, and there are hundreds of his works in this same museum—but only nine canvases by Mondrian.

Also living in Laren at this time was the writer on theosophy, Dr. M. H. J. Schoenmaekers, a former Catholic priest who for years had been working out a personal system which he called "positive mysticism." He had published several works of popularized philosophy, principally *Faith in the New Man* (*Het geloof van den nieuwen mensch*, 4th ed., Amsterdam, Maatschappij voor goedkoop lecture, 1914) and *The New Image of the World* (*Het nieuwe wereldbeeld*, Bossum, van Dishoeck, 1915). Mondrian seems to have particularly liked the latter. He owned two copies, of which he gave me one, warmly recommending that I read it. He had noted, in our conversations, that I was "about ripe for it."

In reading these two works of Schoenmaekers, one is struck by the remarkable affinity with Mondrian's thought as expressed in his notebooks. The theosophist writes, for instance, that the artist "is a mystic to the degree that he contemplates living reality." Of style he gives this simple definition: "The general, despite the particular." Elsewhere he says that the new image of the world should be brought to "a controllable

precision, to a conscious penetration of reality, to an exact beauty." Schoenmaekers' style is extremely clear. It is evident in many places that Mondrian borrowed from him a part of the terminology that appears in the essays published later in *De Stijl*. Unquestionably he took from him the main term, *nieuwe beelding*, which we may translate literally as "new form-construction"—more commonly called neo-plasticism.

Mondrian cites Schoenmaekers somewhere in the third number of *De Stijl*. But although he had such admiration for his work, the man he could scarcely abide. He found Schoenmaekers much too intellectual, too brilliant a talker, too much the man of formulas. "It is not in his blood," Mondrian said of him. "He knows all that with his intelligence, but he remains cold." Mondrian himself was certainly not Schoenmaekers' equal in lively intelligence; what Mondrian acquired never became an *appearance* but slowly enriched his deeper *being*. Thus the two men were not harmonious.

The details that follow I owe to Jacob van Domselaer (as I do certain facts about the calumny leading to the breaking of Mondrian's contract with Bremmer, which he got from Bremmer himself).

Van Domselaer published in 1916 a piano suite entitled *Exercises in Style* (*Proeven van stijl-kunst*). The seven pieces which make up this album were all written to illustrate paintings by Mondrian. The composer asks that they be performed in such a manner as to emphasize the static element (or the harmony) while permitting the movement (or melody) to flow peacefully and uncontrolled, notwithstanding the dominance of the static element. This is equivalent to saying that he wanted his work to be played in horizontal and vertical style. "I tried to translate into music the impression I received from Mondrian," van Domselaer confided to me, "from his personality as much as from his work. I was then completely under his influence. I realize now more than ever how essential to me my contact with him has been. He was a man marvelously rooted in his time, and head and shoulders above his country, which was much too petty bourgeois for him. At the end of 1916 came the parting of our intellectual ways. Mondrian continued in the direction of a certain dogmatism; here I would not follow him. But from 1914 on, Mondrian considered his work achieved; he believed he had done what there was for him to do. 'But then what will you do when the war is over?' I asked him. 'I'll return to France all the same,' he replied, 'even if I never sell another picture. I'll go to the Midi and get work with a peasant picking olives.'"

Destiny, always a trickster, had decided otherwise—in spite of M. Bremmer! There are many people, even today, for whom Mondrian's work begins only with neo-plasticism, that is, in 1918-19.



Bartolomeo Ammanati,  
Ponte Santa Trinità,  
Florence, 1566-69

## CIVIC ART

*Carol Aronovici*

*A city should be built so as to give security  
and happiness to its people.—ARISTOTLE*

A PEOPLE can best be known and understood by its arts and by the art heritage which past generations have bestowed upon it. No art is more complex and more revealing of the soul of a people than community building. Civic art is a symphony in which the arts in their various forms are the musicians, the souls of the people the score.

All civic art has its roots in the history, tradition, institutions, geographic background and, in its final expression, the aspirations of the people. Every stone, every arch, every inscription, every column, every temple or palace, though in ruins, gives tangible evidence of the contemplative mood of a nation and expresses its values of beauty.

I do not wish to imply that all civic art of the past mirrored the public taste, but it does represent in essence the creative powers of the people, whether the initiative came from the masses or the masters. At times the passion for sumptuous civic expression gained such preponderance over the material needs of the masses as to contribute to their degeneration and to the ultimate destruction of a nation. The gaunt ruins of the Eastern Empire remain the silent but eloquent testimony of the failure to bring beauty and felicitous living within the reach of the masses. Ver-

sailles bears witness to the revolutionary seeds that may germinate if human values are disregarded in favor of civic extravagance.

As the pendulum swung in the nineteenth century from oligarchy to democracy, there was a corresponding swing from classicism and romanticism to naturalism, realism, impressionism and the vast variety of art forms which have endeavored to interpret and express the changing values of the culture of the times, both in material implications and spiritual significance.

Already there are clearly discernible evidences of an awareness of the need for a new kind of creative civic design to synthesize the functional values of a mechanistic age with a desire for civic expression, which, though still immature, holds promise of new creative possibilities. Pierre Lavedan, the historian of urbanism, assumes that "Beauty is the most exact adaptation to an end." This is a striking, but in no way satisfactory, definition of civic art, since it is not clear whether that end is merely functional in the mechanistic sense, or whether in evaluating the end to be achieved account is to be taken of men's souls. Though Le Corbusier is inescapably committed to "the machine for living," he broadens this vision by his

contention (in a lecture delivered in 1934 before the Institut International de Coopération Intellectuelle) that "The works of utility become obsolete every day; their usefulness dies, new utility takes its place; function is no longer taken into account, but the attitude. . . . Our emotions have come into play. It is a question of poetry, and what remains of human enterprise is not what serves, but what creates emotion."

It is a strange phenomenon that while most of the arts have revolted against the arid functionalistic and mechanistic trends of our age, architecture—and what is left of civic design and its traditions—have in large measure surrendered to them. Thus the architect has resorted to a sort of geometric nudism, by making the obvious more obvious and by displaying a kind of chastity of form wholly devoid of modesty. By a process of self-effacement, the architect has handed over his place in the art of building to the engineer, who in his endeavor to extract from geometry some kind of esthetic principles has succeeded only in producing overwhelming monotony. Yielding to the same kind of functional imperatives, real or imaginary, and the real-estate profit motive, the civic designer has been replaced by the engineering expert, who, though master of the art of building, fails to master the art of life.

The civic designer's function is to reconcile mass with space. The relation between these must be established by considerations of form, texture,

color, fitness, fluidity and movement, as they are embodied in the mass which forms the objective, with space as the perspective. Architecture is, therefore, the prime factor in creating esthetic values that may be revealed by space as perspective. With the cooperation of the sculptor, the mural decorator, the painter and the landscape architect, the civic designer must evolve the symbolism of our culture. But there can be no civic art without good architecture, since there are no spiritual values in vistas unless there is something worth contemplating.

Indeed, architecture is not an individualistic art. Of course a building must be "functional," but this merely represents the formal expression of its particular use. Beyond this, it must meet a double obligation towards the community: on the one hand is its obligation towards the beholder, whose concern as to its function is remote or non-existent, and on the other is the relation that each building bears to neighboring structures within the same range of vision. Architecturally a neighborhood is not a display of the competitive talents of master builders, but a concerted effort such as we may discern in the building of the great cathedrals—whenever architects realize that a building is not a means for exposing the complex mechanisms of its functions, but rather for revealing the symbolism of its value in the complex civic structure of the place where we live, work and find realization as individuals and members of society.



*Plan for Amsterdam,  
prepared by CIAM  
(from Paul Bromberg,  
Architecture in the Netherlands,  
Netherlands Information Bureau,  
1944)*



Queen Square, Bloomsbury, London, 1812 (from S. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, Harvard, 1949)

Architecture is, of course, not the only component of civic art. No other discipline brings into harmonious relation so many art forms and such a wide range of materials as does civic design. Each work must maintain its individuality and express its inner purpose, while flowing into the stream of the composite mass and space.

It is often claimed that people are not interested in art, and that in a democracy the masses bring art down to their own level. I believe with Schiller that "it is not true that it is the public which brings art down to its level. It is the artist who lowers the level of public taste." In this connection I should like to quote a passage from George Santayana's *The Sense of Beauty*: "In the sphere of the senses, therefore, a certain cultivation is inevitable in man; often greater, indeed, among rude people, perhaps among animals, than those whose attention takes the wider sweep and whose ideas are more abstract. Without requiring, therefore, that a man should rise above his station, or develop capacities which his opportunities will seldom employ, he may yet endow his life with esthetic interest, if we allow him the enjoyment of sensuous beauty. This enriches him without adding to his labor and flatters him without alienating him from his world."

This country is faced with the need and the opportunity for carrying out great enterprises of community building and rebuilding. These include redevelopment projects, vast housing projects, public buildings—such as schools, hospitals, airway terminals—as well as the demolition of vast slum areas, made possible by the 1949 Federal Housing Act. The times are replete with revolu-

tionary civic possibilities, and the role of the civic designer is to come to grips with his epoch.

Civic art, like all other arts, is a process of penetration and interpretation of emotional values that grasps the essentials by the simplest means. The form must embody the inevitable finality which, while immune to the passing of time, yet contains in essence the values of the epoch in which it is created. As a collective work, the community both forms and reveals national character and culture. There are no fixed rules in civic art, only situations and standards of beauty. In our own time, civic art must find a way to bring into harmony our fragmentary and highly individualistic, mechanistic civilization, in order to evolve a significant esthetic symbolism capable of giving meaning and joy to life without confusing the process of realistic exploitation of technology and its humanistic values. Communal living must be regarded not alone as a social and economic phenomenon, but as an opportunity for intellectual and emotional experience.

That there is beauty and grandeur, sometimes infernal grandeur, in our cities, cannot be denied. That the early settlers and community builders had a sense of moral obligation to respect and serve the craving for harmony and peace and for the beauty of nature in their surroundings, is evident from the most casual study of the older communities, both towns and villages, which have not wholly succumbed to modern mercantilism and industrialism. By simple restraint and a sense of common decency these communities attained grace, dignity, harmony, simplicity and tranquility. Today, however, we are living in a new era with new motivations, new ways of life, new



Jacques-Angé Gabriel, *Place de la Concorde, Paris, 1753-54* (engraving from *Patte, Monumens érigés en France à la Gloire de Louis XVI*)

aspirations, new and more efficient forces of production, new concepts of time and space, a wider range of social, economic and cultural advantages and responsibilities. Our economy, politics and technology have become too complex for the average individual to understand.

So fundamental and so rapid a transition demands not alone new forms and new functional implements, but a new synthesis between life's purpose and its emotional and esthetic implications. To transfuse the vitality and creative forces of the age, the civic designer must be able to deal with the forces of a new and advancing civilization, bridle the complexities of functional mechanization so that they may fit into the pattern of life's essential purposes, and overcome the unyielding rigidity of outmoded community forms and functions. The new art of city building must, therefore, be evolved out of the conflicts between the anachronisms of the past, the violent tempo of a scientific age, the widening scope of democratic well-being, the revolutionary changes in our way of life and the lyric human values that arise out of the contemplation of beauty.

By this token civic art, the most complex of the arts, is at the same time the least personal. It must idealize the human and humanize the inanimate. The community planner, the architect, the engineer, the sculptor, the mural painter, the landscape architect and the social scientist must strike a balance between what is physically imperative and what is spiritually desirable.

Civic design is a four-dimensional art. Its basic material must be derived from the social philosophy of the people whom it is designed to

serve. Out of their many-sided cultural values must be forged a kind of prophetic vision in which the past, the present and the future will assume new dimensions of order, grace, beauty, nobility and joy by reconciling the mechanistic with the humanistic, the ethical with the esthetic. This synthesis of knowledge and art was long ago anticipated by Leonardo da Vinci when he said: "Art becomes more scientific and science more artistic the further they advance." A city is the most tangible reality of the cultural history of a people. The measure in which it successfully merges the culture of the past with the humanism of the present is the measure of the progress of its citizens. The Place de la Concorde and the Place d'Etoile, with their broad and entrancing vistas; the recently built Palais de Chaillot with its view of the Seine River and the city of Paris, are rich examples of a world metropolis which has evolved with the new order and yet cherishes its tradition. The cities of Mannheim, with its plan developed as far back as 1699, and Karlsruhe, planned in 1822, show a keen perception of the need for rationalizing the form of the city so that it may respond both to functional demands and to the sensitized tastes of an evolved culture.

The second dimension within which the civic designer must work is space-time. The earlier cities had to deal with space-time that remained constant as long as movement was not accelerated by mechanization. In the last half century our tempo has accelerated to a degree that has revolutionized our whole concept of space and, in consequence, our concept of time, thus giving space a new relationship to movement. Roads are no longer means of access but rivers of traffic, largely



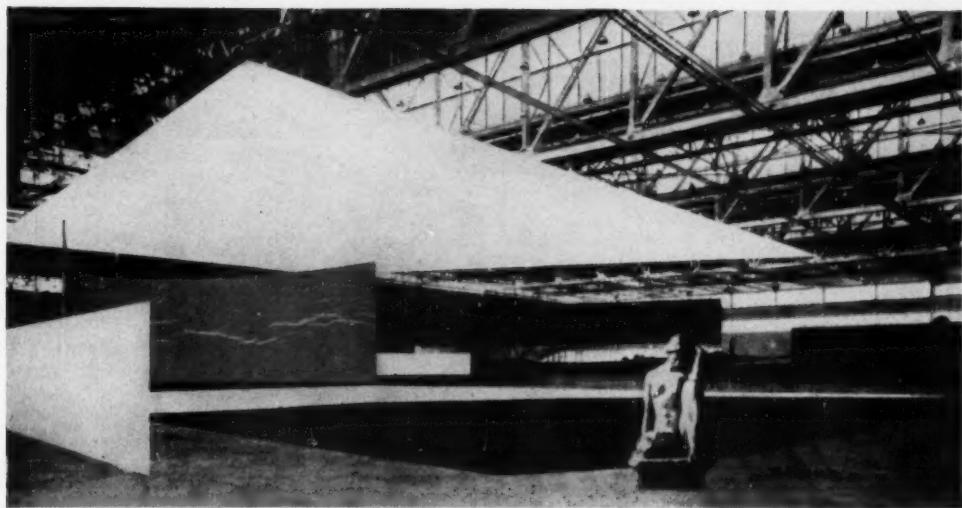
Plan of Nancy, 1633, from contemporary engraving

depersonalized from their immediate surroundings. The problem that the civic designer must meet is to retain certain intimate relations between the roads or streets and their immediate environment while allowing them to fulfil their function as traffic arteries leading into distances unrelated to their specific locality. How to create symmetry between the open spaces and the immediate surroundings while attaining adequate objectivity and variety in the treatment of roads as avenues of travel, is the task of the modern civic designer.

The morphology of a city or town is determined by its open space, with the streets or roads constituting the main skeletal and circulatory system. The impact of the speed and load which our streets must withstand has so completely disoriented the work of the planners that road planning has become synonymous with city planning. In his charming book *The Road*, Hilaire Belloc recognizes the fact that "There are moments in the history of the road in any society where the whole use of it, the construction of it and its character, have to be transformed." The crude surgery of modern street planning must give way to new and revolutionary concepts of the function of the street, based upon a dual interpretation of its function: one having to do with the comfort, convenience and safety of the city dweller, and the other with the flow of traffic, unrelated—or only distantly related—to the locale the vehicles traverse. Indeed, this duality has already found expression in many land subdivisions where block units, open spaces and perspectives are assuming new aspects. The form, the texture, the poly-

Avenue de l'Opéra, from the Opera to the Louvre and the Rue de Rivoli (from S. Giedion, *Space, Time and Architecture*, Harvard, 1949)





Mies van der Rohe, Project for concert hall, 1942 (from Philip C. Johnson, *Mies van der Rohe, Museum of Modern Art, 1947*)

chromy, the light, the seasons, the vegetations, the distant vistas all play, or should play, their part in attaining an esthetic climate fit for architecture, sculpture, landscape design, pageantry, parades, outdoor festivals and the many forms of civic expression which an enlightened people need and are capable of developing.

In dealing with the lives of people the need often arises for considering man's ability to find a sense of proportion adequate to his own immutable, limited size, and his capacity for contemplating his surroundings. Le Corbusier, in his book *Quand les cathédrales étaient blanches*, has this to say about New York: "New York is a perpendicular city, under the sign of the new times. It is a catastrophe, a beautiful and dignified catastrophe, but of a hasty destiny which has overwhelmed people of faith and courage." It is a rather strange evaluation. The catastrophe is inherent in the complete disregard of the human scale, but the "faith and courage" stem not from the roots of human aspiration, but rather from greed, which demands the utmost financial return from every square foot of land. In his woodcuts the artist Frans Masereel has caught clearly and with great understanding the infernal confusion which arises from concentrating masses of human beings on sweated land.

To disregard the human scale of perception and human relationships is to depersonalize life, to

alienate the values to be derived from the intimate relations between people and to transform neighborly and civic cooperation into mob competition for air, space, freedom of movement, or the simplest essentials required for the quiet contemplation of one's surroundings. New York's monstrous beauty has not been achieved by its perpendicularity, nor by the great towers which rise up from the canyons of its residential and business slums. It is the contrast between horizontality and perpendicularity that gives accent and character to the city's skyline. The church steeples, the *campanili*, such as that of Bruges in the thirteenth-century market place or the massive tower of Malines, the cathedrals of Chartres or Rouen, the many domed churches and public edifices of Paris and Rome, seem to embody the spiritual culmination of succeeding epochs—a kind of melodious rhythm that is free from monotony. To the extent that they express the aspirations of an age, they are functional in the highest degree. Our towers of commerce, though monuments of technological skill, are functional neither in their structural efficiency nor as part of the complex tissue of the metropolitan community. Though they may enhance real-estate values, they stifle the normal process of communal functioning, are out of scale with the open space and streets about them and add little to the civic decorum of the city, except in the aggregate view in which the skyscraper



Frans Masereel, wood engraving (from *La Ville*, Paris, Albert Morance, 1925)

helps to relieve the monotony of uniform height.

The time must come when the technologist and the poet—one with the chill diagnosis of the science of profit and mechanization, the other with the passionate imagery of beauty—will meet on a common ground and compose out of dreams and reality a city that will express the full communion of personality with society. Years ago I came across a bit of verse by an unknown poet, which I am impelled to quote as expressive of the idea I wish to convey:

*O foolish builders, wake,  
Take your trowels, take  
The poet's dream and build  
The city song has willed,  
That every stone may sing,  
And all your roads ring  
With happy wayfaring.*

All cities and towns must conform to the terrain upon which they stand. The destiny of a city is the synergy between the bounty of nature and man's imaginative effort to bring nature's potentials to fruition. The distant mountains with their watersheds, the navigable waters, the harbors, the fertile soils, the changes in the seasons, the yearly days of sunshine, the flora and fauna, the gentle contour of the land and the hills are the

View of Public Square, Lüneburg, looking towards the Johanniskirche, 14th-16th century



elements out of which man may create either cities "that chill the beams of the morning sun" or are "fit for God's ally."

The Tiber River and the seven hills upon which Rome stands, the gentle hills of the Tuscan country crowned by the city of Florence, the Vienna Woods, the mountain vistas of the Swiss country, the early spring in Paris with its fleecy clouds and blue skies—all are materials out of which has been created civic art that has reached across the centuries. We need not forego the material values to be derived from the earth and from human endeavor. We need only modulate between economy and vision. Out of nature's rich and infinitely varied, vital materials, the civic designer can create a haven in which architecture, sculpture, mural paintings and fountains may conspire to mold a setting wherein man may find joy, peace and contemplation, without in the least hampering

or retarding his power to produce the necessities or amenities of life.

Cities have dimensions, texture, movement, color, as well as voices. Silent cities are dead cities. Industrialism and mechanization have changed the melodious voices of the past, with their street criers, slow-moving carts, carillons, street musicians and vendors, into a raucous rumble and roar of trucks, elevated roads, steam hammers, automobile horns and factory whistles. Can we not bring back into our cities the music which was once so dear to the town dweller of the past?

These problems merit our concerted efforts to face and try to solve. For long after the technology and industry of our day have changed beyond recognition, and our social and economic values have been replaced by a new order, the civic values which we have created will remain as the lasting heritage of our age.

*F. Gibberd, Maxwell Fry  
and Harlow Design Group,  
Mark Hall Neighborhood,  
Harlow New Town, near London, 1947  
(from S. Giedion, CIAM:  
A Decade of New Architecture,  
Zurich, Girsberger, 1951)*



## DONALD J. BEAR

The Editorial Board of *MAGAZINE OF ART* at its meeting on April 3rd, 1952, unanimously adopted the following resolution:

*The Editorial Board of MAGAZINE OF ART wishes to record its grateful remembrance of the valuable services of our late colleague, Donald J. Bear, member of the Board since its establishment in 1942. Although unable to attend meetings because of distance, he was always generous in his interest in the magazine, in giving advice, and in general support. The magazine has lost a true friend and collaborator.*

Mr. Bear, who died on March 16th, was Director of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and former director of the Denver Art Museum.

## Contributors

The article by *GEORGE BOAS* was originally delivered as the banquet address at the annual convention of The American Federation of Arts held in Philadelphia last June. Mr. Boas, Professor of the History of Philosophy at Johns Hopkins University, was president of the American Society of Aesthetics, 1948-50. A member of *MAGAZINE OF ART's* Editorial Board, he is widely known as a writer, his most recent book being *Wingless Pegasus: A Handbook for Critics*.

*UMBRO APOLLONIO*, Director of the Galleria d'Arte Moderna at Venice, is a well-known writer on contemporary art. He is also head of archives for the permanent committee of the Biennale and a member of the editorial board of its quarterly publication. Frances Lanza translated his article for *MAGAZINE OF ART*.

*WYLIE SYPHER* is chairman of the Division of Language, Literature and the Arts at Simmons College. His article is excerpted from a forthcoming book on the relations between form in the fine arts and form in literature, for the preparation of which he held a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1950-51.

The Belgian poet and art critic *MICHEL SEUPHOR* was a personal friend of both Theo van Doesburg and Mondrian; his article, translated by Lionel Abel, is part of a forthcoming monograph on the latter. In 1930 M. Seuphor was editor of the Paris abstractionist magazine, *Cercle et Carré*. He has also written a history of abstract art, and following a visit to the United States in 1950 prepared the survey of contemporary American painting which appeared last June as a special issue of *Art aujourd'hui*.

*CAROL ARONOVICI*, architect, writer and teacher, has for many years been engaged in community planning and housing. As public official or consultant, he has prepared zoning ordinances and development plans for a number of cities. He is at present teaching at the New School for Social Research and writing a book on civic art, of which the article here published is a part.

The editors regret that the following information was inadvertently omitted from the notes on contributors in last month's issue:

*HANS HILDEBRANDT* is widely known as a writer on twentieth-century German art. A member of the faculty of the Technische Hochschule at Stuttgart, he has recently published a monograph on Oskar Schlemmer. An excerpt from that study appeared in our January 1950 issue; like the article on Baumeister, it was translated for *MAGAZINE OF ART* by Alexander Gode von Aesch.

The translator of *JURGIS BALTRUSAITIS'* article on "Eighteenth-Century Gardens and Fanciful Landscapes" was Jacques LeClercq, Associate Professor in the Department of Romance Languages at Queens College.

Readers are reminded that with this issue, *MAGAZINE OF ART* suspends publication until October.

## Notice of AFA Annual Meeting

The 1952 annual meeting of THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS will take place in conjunction with the joint session of the AFA and the Art Section of the American Association of Museums, to be held in Minneapolis on Wednesday evening, May 28th.

All members of the AFA are cordially invited to attend. For further information, write: The American Federation of Arts, 1083 Fifth Avenue, New York 28.

## Note

Readers of *MAGAZINE OF ART* will recall the "Letters to the Editor" in the March issue, relating to the National Sculpture Society's protest to the Metropolitan Museum of Art on its recent exhibition, "American Sculpture-1951." Since then, over twenty Trustees of The American Federation of Arts have issued the following statement:

"The Trustees of The American Federation of Arts wish to express their support of the Trustees and the Officers of The Metropolitan Museum of Art in the recent controversy caused by the letter recently circulated by the National Sculpture Society in regard to the Museum's exhibition, 'American Sculpture-1951.'"

"Differences on art questions are normal and inevitable in the art world and should be re-

spected. On the other hand, the writers of the letter referred to above, by injecting irrelevant ideological and political charges in their letter, and by circulating it for signature to several thousand persons with little connection with the art world and not fully aware of the issues involved, have engaged in a campaign which tends improperly to discredit a highly responsible art institution and to limit the freedom of artistic expression.

"We wish to express the sincere hope that attacks of this nature will not affect the Metropolitan Museum's constructive program and similar programs in the field of American art."

Similar resolutions have been passed by Artists Equity Association at its annual National Delegates Meeting held March 28-29th in Philadelphia; by the Directors of the College Art Association; and by the Executive Board of the Sculptors Guild at its meeting on March 9th, subsequently unanimously approved at the general membership meeting held March 27th.

## Letters to the Editor

Sir:

On February 28th of this year the People's Art Center Association of St. Louis celebrated the tenth anniversary of its service to the community.

Ten years ago W. P. A. was still in existence. In many cities art centers had been established with its aid, which mostly consisted in supplying personnel once the centers were set up. The Government's policy was that specified minimum funds and adequate quarters for the project must be provided in the community before W. P. A. could undertake to aid in staffing.

Certain members of the St. Louis community particularly interested in art realized that there were lower-income sections of the city where people—especially children—had little access to the stimulation and enjoyment that art can bring to everyday life. That the section of the city most lacking such facilities had a large percentage of Negro population only added to the interest of the possibility of establishing an art center.

Early in 1942 Mr. Holger Cahill came to St. Louis and addressed an audience which included men and women, both Negro and white, who had evinced active interest in the establishment of an art center. The meeting was held in a large Negro church; the audience listened attentively both to Mr. Cahill and to several follow-up pleas for interest and support.

The start of the Center's slender fund; was made that evening. Interest grew, instead of slackening off, as it all too often does. Slowly and painfully, increasing support was gained for the venture. Its first home was in the parish building of a church whose congregation had moved westward with the city's population changes. The

rector of this congregation came on the board and helped. W. P. A. aided not only with personnel but with ideas for the inexpensive remodeling and decoration of the Center's quarters.

The board, the staff and the patrons of the Center were from the outset drawn from both Negro and white elements in town. This proved of inestimable advantage when serious problems arose, as they very shortly did. First of all, W. P. A. went out of existence when the defense effort went into high gear. Next, the buildings the Center occupied were sold. But as interest and understanding of the work increased, old friends rallied and new ones were gained. A commodious old house was finally acquired for back taxes; this together with the stable behind it have now been put into condition to house to good advantage the Center's varied program.

Because of its outstanding example in developing helpful and imaginative race relations, the Center received an award from the St. Louis Urban League. It was also accepted as a member agency in the annual United Charities drive.

The Center has had the courage not only to make every effort to reach the many needs of that portion of the community which it primarily serves, but to submit this effort to sympathetic though critical outside examination, with the resultant strengthening of its program.

Today it occupies a unique place in its community. The People's Art Center is a living example of what enthusiasm, good will and mutual understanding can accomplish in bringing to a crowded modern city the joys and opportunities of a varied and lively art experience.

CHARLES NAGEL  
Brooklyn Museum

Sir:

The writer is making a long-range study of the life and work of Maximilian Godefroy and would be grateful for any information and material that could be supplied by your readers. In particular, information is needed concerning Godefroy's works outside of Baltimore, and also his activity in Europe.

RICHARD R. BORNEMAN, Archivist  
The Peale Museum, Baltimore, Md.

Sir:

Mary Rumsey, who is now preparing the life story of Charles Carey Rumsey, would appreciate receiving any information on this artist.

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*Films on Art* also contains useful articles by authorities in the field: IRIS BARRY, former Director, Film Library, Museum of Modern Art; CHARLES D. GAITSKELL, Director of Art Education, Province of Ontario; H. W. JANSON, Chairman, Art Department, Washington Square College, New York University; PATRICK T. MALONE, Director of Film Programs, Chicago Art Institute; PERRY MILLER, Director, Film Advisory Center; and ARTHUR KNIGHT, film critic.

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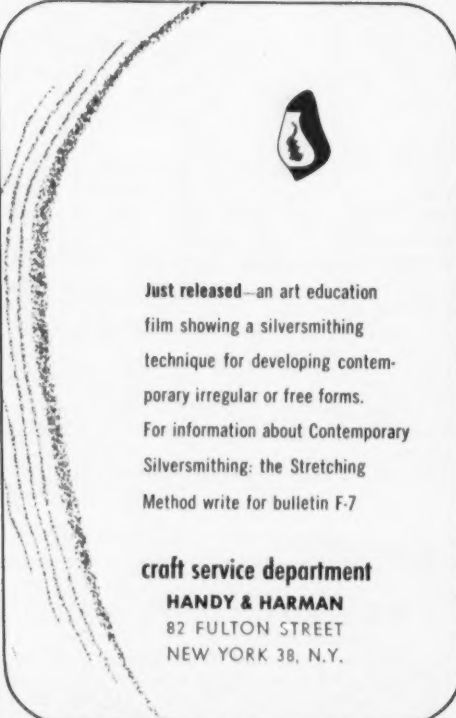
## Film Review

*Van Meegeren's Faked Vermeers*, produced by Sofedi, Brussels, in cooperation with the Central Laboratory of Belgian Museums, directed by Jan Botermans and G. A. Magnel assisted by Maurice de Smet, commentary translated by Alice E. Higgins, narrated by Frank Phillips. Music by Corelli and Handel adapted by Ernest Baeckelmans. 16 mm; black-and-white; sound; 3 reels (27 min.). Distributed by Films of the Nations, Inc., 62 W. 43 St., New York. Rental \$7.50; sale \$90.

Some day Hollywood will undoubtedly produce a fictionalized biography of Van Meegeren who made 6,745,000 Dutch guilders (at that time more than three and a half million dollars) by forging Vermeers. In the meantime, this interesting documentary, based on Dr. P. B. Coremans' excellent book *Van Meegeren's Faked Vermeers and De Hoochs* (London, 1949), acquaints the public with the major facts of the case. Although Dr. Coremans was prominently active in the scientific examination of the forgeries, he makes only one brief appearance in this film, when—every inch the nemesis of forgers—he leaves his museum in Brussels to make a new search of Van Meegeren's studio in Nice.

The film is a fascinating report of a game of "cops and robbers," in which the resources of a modern laboratory are matched against the tricks of a "not-so-mad" evil genius. At the film's end, the camera eye glides admiringly across gleaming tables, vials and machines—the shiny armor of the successful researchers. By contrast, Van Meegeren's studio had been shown before filled with a wild disorder of paint-tubes and mixing bowls, reminiscent of the picturesque habitat of an old-time alchemist. Yet, while neat virtue wins out over untidy evil, there is no denying that the film leaves the beholder with a good deal of admiration for the scrappy Dutchman who decided to confound the experts and, sad to say, succeeded only too well. I would not be surprised if many spectators were to take home less of an increased confidence in the detection of fraud, than a vague feeling that at least some of these forgeries were works of great artistic merit. The man whose disdainful and cold, mean face appears in a few still photos throughout the film (was no newsreel made at the time of the lawsuit against Van Meegeren?) could not ask for a greater triumph.

I do not, however, share the admiration for even the best of the forgeries as works of great expressive power; nor do I subscribe to the thesis, implied in the film's presentation, that it was only Van Meegeren's own proud claim of authorship, at the time of his trial as a Nazi collaborator, that led to the detection. A good many people had already become suspicious of the many Vermeer "discoveries," and there is a like-



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lihood that the case would have broken very soon anyhow—even though it might have taken longer to establish the awful truth.

Such criticism aside, the film does a good job. Although often technical, it is never dull. Its three parts (The Proof of the Forgeries; The Reconstruction of Van Meegeren's Method; Van Meegeren's Motive) could perhaps have been blended better, but the presentation has the virtue of great clarity. Commentary and visuals support each other well (though Corelli's and Handel's music seem to be out of place), and the sequence of stills, diagrams and action shots is pleasantly varied throughout. The confrontation of objects represented in the false Vermeers and Pieter De Hoochs with their models, found in Van Meegeren's studio, and the proof by X-ray that underneath some of the false paintings lie the remnants of older pictures which Van Meegeren is known to have owned—these are triumphs of detective work in the best Baker-Street tradition. And it is comforting to see that one of the scientists, while checking the damning microscopic presence of modern cobalt blue in the forgeries, does his task without ever removing a smoking pipe from his mouth. Dr. Watson's friend, if I remember correctly, was also a great believer in pipes!

JULIUS S. HELD  
Barnard College

## Recent Art Film Releases

*Creative Art of Japan*, produced by Orbit Films.

Examples of Japanese art in the Far-Eastern Collection of the Seattle Art Museum, from prehistoric times to the eighteenth century. Commentary by Dr. Sherman E. Lee. 16 mm; color; sound; 2 reels (20 min.). Available from Dimensions, Inc., 2521 Sixth Avenue, Seattle 1, Wash. Rental \$5; sale \$175.

*Refractions #1*, by Jim Davis, produced by Robert T.

Lindsay; music by E. W. James. An abstract film showing forms under the play of refracted, rather than reflected, light. 16 mm; color; sound; 1 reel (8 min.). Available from A. F. Films, Inc., 1600 Broadway, New York 19. Rental \$5; sale \$90.

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### Brief synopsis of the film:

In 1939 the world of art was surprised and delighted by the discovery of a hitherto unknown Vermeer, a superb painting of "Christ at Emmaus." The celebrated Dutch expert Bredius hailed it as "every inch a Vermeer" and enthusiastically signed a certificate of authenticity. During the next few years several more Vermeers appeared on the market and all were accepted as genuine by museums and prominent art critics alike.

This remarkable film, an artistic detective story, tells the tale of the most fabulous hoax in the history of art. In true detective style, the film explores Van Meegeren's background and motives, picturing him as a frustrated artist longing to cause a sensation among the critics who had dismissed him as a third-rate painter. Step by step it shows how scientific tests proved the paintings to be contemporary rather than 17th Century, in spite of the old canvases used. Microscopic examination of the paintings substantiated Van Meegeren's claim to authorship. The film demonstrates in full both the tests used to gather the proof and Van Meegeren's own techniques of falsification.



"VAN MEEGEREN'S FAKED VERMEERS"

Left: "Woman playing music" by Van Meegeren  
Compare with

Right: Genuine Vermeer (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art)

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# Book Reviews

Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, New York, Museum of Modern Art (distributed by Simon and Schuster), 1951. 591 pp., incl. 264 pp. of black-and-white + 23 color plates. \$12.50.

*Matisse: His Art and His Public*, the recently published monograph by Alfred H. Barr, Jr., is based on a plan wisely laid down a long time ago by a man who knows what he is talking about. The author was fitted for his task by every possible endowment; loving and understanding, painting, he has always sponsored and spread knowledge of it. His book, at once varied and exact, may be said to constitute a summation of all the comments furnished by the critics, the artist himself, his friends and his collectors. And it is as an art historian that Mr. Barr has followed, year by year, the development of an exceptionally rich career—Matisse's sixty years of eight hours' daily work.

Mr. Barr's study is written with such economy of detail that it never evokes the slightest weariness on the part of the reader, who at every period of the artist's life is always eager to keep on reading further. This book will interest "the subtle and the crustaceous," in André Gide's phrase, for one never encounters in it any comment so personal as to distract one from the historical interest of each page or from the wealth of magnificent works of art that constitute the artist's evolution. Everything is recounted with precision and integrity. This is a book that lacks nothing; and if the author has not mentioned some paintings which might have found their place in the course of his study, this was probably due to his desire to avoid the repetitions inevitable (and yet, in a text, boring) when dealing with a life so full of innumerable achievements. He has not attempted a *catalogue raisonné*—a task on which Mme Matisse and her daughter Mme Dut-huit are currently engaged, and which will one of these days fill a lacuna. But he has utilized the most exact sources of information, has ransacked the recollections of those who were able to provide him with useful and interesting details, has compared dates and has published letters. In this immense task, Mr. Barr was aided by a number of well-disposed collaborators, whose aid he has gratefully acknowledged in his preface, and each of whom has in his own way added some impor-

tant contribution to the structure which Mr. Barr, fulfilling his intention, has successfully erected. Thus from the very outset in reading this book it becomes apparent that the author has shed considerable much-needed light on the principal events of Matisse's artistic career. The creative intelligence of Mr. Barr has shaped this history, which poses many problems and which reveals the artist to us under his most varied aspects.

This particular, well-developed method of work is practically unknown in Europe. As an art historian whose first duty it is to be impartial, it is a pleasure for me to state what I have often observed, that in the United States art is not only a spiritual relaxation. It inspires a fruitful sense of competition among those engaged in research, with the result that the truth must inevitably come to light and assert itself. This is not to imply that we in Europe lack competent men in this field: we can pride ourselves on such outstanding authorities as Lionello Venturi, André Malraux and René Huyghe, to cite only a few. But I don't believe that it would ever enter the head of any of them to enlist the cooperation of another critic or collector, even though undoubtedly their writings might be enriched by such recollections, individual opinions or special knowledge. We Europeans are such incorrigible individualists that, through long-established habits of work, it seems to go against the grain for us to bring to bear on our work any abilities other than those that we believe ourselves to possess, and which we are reluctant to share.

Had Mr. Barr allowed himself to be wholly carried away by the historical aspects of his study, the result would have been a fairly dry sequence of dates, without any side-excursions into the circumstances surrounding Matisse's production. As an example of his method, I may cite the pages devoted to the Chapel of the Dominican Sisters at Vence, which constitute an excellent conclusion to this monumental volume of two hundred eighty-eight pages of text and more than two hundred fifty pages of illustrations—many excellently reproduced in color.

Without ever allowing the reader's interest to flag, the author has devoted equal attention to the esthetic and the historical aspects of his narrative. The interdependence of these two types of criticism here results in their mutual enhancement, which is just as it should be. Art history is one discipline, esthetics another; but in this book we have proof that in the pursuit of knowledge

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they may safely be combined, to the great advantage of the reader. Thus each work of Matisse takes its chronological place, and a picture of evaluations emerges which shows us, on the one hand, the lack of understanding on the part of critics and official authorities, while at the same time certain collectors, fired by enthusiasm, were giving full recognition to the painter and creating an audience for him which was to multiply astoundingly in the course of time. Thus Mr. Barr's book merits its title, *Matisse: His Art and His Public*. Here one should recall that it was the Stein family—to whom modern painting owes such a debt of gratitude—who first brought to the United States paintings by Matisse. But, as we are reminded by the author, it was in 1889 that the Metropolitan Museum—eighteen years before the Louvre—gave its visitors the opportunity to admire two paintings by Manet. In the course of Matisse's long and active career, American collectors were to play an important role, no less considerable than that of the two Russian collectors, Morosov and Shchukin, who were canny enough to buy Matisse's and Picassos by the dozen when these two artists were completely spurned in France itself. For Matisse, as Alfred Barr takes pains to remind us, was by no means young when he attained fame; and it was not until he was fifty-one that his first work was allowed to hang in the Luxembourg Museum. By that time, what achievements already lay behind him! How many amazing works had he painted since the period when he, together with Derain, Braque, Friesz and Vlaminck, took the leadership in that coloristic revolution, fauvism, which overthrew the canons set up by the impressionists. I believe that the real Matisse was born in that conflict, and that in the course of the years, as his drawing has steadily become more proficient and his coloring more fluid, he has gone on felicitously to attain incomparable mastery. One might characterize his painting as vision treated in accordance with the most profound knowledge of the laws of light. One might also add—without wishing to shock the sensibilities of those who would not agree—that never has anyone since Watteau so delightfully explored the refinements of color.

But Mr. Barr has not confined his attention to Matisse as painter alone. He has faithfully shown the artist's admirable capacities as draftsman, as sculptor (hitherto little heeded), as illustrator of a succession of texts beginning with Stéphane Mallarmé's *Poésies*. Certainly Matisse, who loved Cézanne and was among the first to buy one of the latter's *Bathers* from Ambroise Vollard, could never lay claim to be a great innovator like the master of Aix. Nevertheless he has gone farther than anyone else along the path of subtlety in color and delicate harmony of tones. He has utilized color to create his ideas and images, without ever letting it run away with his artistic creation. His work has always kept in

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touch with actuality, and he has been able to express reality through his personality as an artist rather than through his personality as a man—though the latter is highly developed, and he is extraordinarily intelligent, as no one can doubt who reads his *Notes of a Painter*, which is reprinted in this book.

I would like to see some critic draw the analogies between Matisse's art and music. I don't believe anyone has emphasized this point sufficiently; for if, as the German romantic Novalis has said, color is broken light, then music can be regarded as broken movement. Is it not striking to see parallel emotions and ideas manifest themselves in different periods within the respective realms of the laws imposed on creative artists in music and in painting? These similarities, expressed by diametrically opposed means that appeal to apparently entirely separate senses, are nowadays taken for granted. There is something of Beethoven's sonority in Rembrandt, in spite of the disparity in period between the composer and the painter. Thus it would seem even more logical to find likenesses between artists of the same country and school. There are undeniable affinities between Claude Debussy's music and impressionist painting. And isn't it true that the brush of Matisse finds an echo in the work of Maurice Ravel? For Matisse is a musician in color. And I believe that one could sum up most of his works in the words: "The minimum of substance within an infinite range of unexpected tones, to achieve a maximum of contrasts."

To anyone who wishes full comprehension of Matisse's work, Alfred Barr has rendered a great service. He has blazed the way, and he was perfectly right in believing, when he undertook this work, that the thirty volumes and monographs previously consecrated to Matisse were no more than isolated witnesses to the whole. It was high time that a monumental work should bring before the world of art a complete panorama of the long and prosperous life of a painter who, all alone, and remote from well-traveled paths, sacrificed his own best interests for the greater glory of his achievement as an artist.

I once overheard a stranger, looking at one of Matisse's paintings, utter this simple and picturesque comment: "It sings like a bird." It seems to me that no scholarly opinion could better summarize the work of this great artist.

RENÉ GAFFE  
Brussels, Belgium

Marshall B. Davidson, *Life in America*, Boston, Houghton Mifflin in association with Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1951. 2 vols., 1076 pp., 1200 illus. \$20.

*Life in America* by Marshall B. Davidson has already been through the reviewing mills. The ayes have it. Mr. Davidson's achievement is broad in scope and youth-renewing. Although the labor involved in writing and organizing these volumes was necessarily great, there is no sign of fatigue; they keep up their spirits from first to last. Indeed the interest is cumulative as the author takes his readers, step by step, from the myths that were America to the complexities that are America. The writing is unbiased and thoroughly American without being jingoistic. The author has a nice sense of pithy comment. For instance, when Chester Harding was painting the portrait of Daniel Boone, he asked his sitter "if he never got lost having no compass" and Boone replied, "No, I can't say as ever I was lost, but I was bewildered once for three days."

The modest and admitted progenitors of Mr. Davidson's much larger work were the delightful *Life in America* exhibition, held by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1939, and its catalogue, for which Mr. Harry B. Wehle, then Curator of Painting, wrote the apt and witty introduction. That catalogue, with its entertaining social sidelights, has become a collector's item. Its value has been increased by the fact that it suggested Mr. Davidson's more expansive undertaking. Incidentally this undertaking is one which we should expect to be published "in association" with an historical rather than an art museum, since art does not predominate in text or illustration.

The exhibition of 1939 was limited to paintings, whereas Mr. Davidson, aiming at a much more comprehensive picture of American life, has explored all media pertinent to his purpose, from painting to maps and photography. In his chapter called "A Nation on Wheels," for example, he has relied entirely on photographs to illustrate his subject; but whenever he could dig up (and he has done a staggering amount of digging) a worthwhile artist's documenting picture contemporary with the event, he seems to have made use of it.

Fully illustrated books are not rare, but they have become expensive. Yet today we are trained to expect abounding illustration. The number of pictures which the newspapers, and *Life* magazine and its imitators, devote to current

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events, added to newsreel and television reports, has taught us to expect a visual report of each day as it passes. So it is not the "over twelve hundred illustrations" that make *Life in America* exceptional. It is, as always in graphic surveys, the choice of the material, both written and pictorial, and the clarity and logic of its presentation. An enormous mass of material has been excavated and screened with good judgment.

Furthermore, the notes, bibliography, list of artists and the index are so complete that they put the final touch on a book arranged throughout to stimulate the reader to delve further into the subjects of his choice. The author says frankly that he has gone to the authorities, and he skimps no credits which, somehow, makes his work more attractive. When they have led him to source material that promised to reward his research, he has followed their leads. The illustrations, with the exception of a few "*ex post facto* reconstructions" are of course source material. It was the finding and selecting of these which especially concerned Mr. Davidson. Some of his pictures are published for the first time. Probably no two people would choose the same material with which to illustrate American life. For myself I would choose more portraits than Mr. Davidson has utilized, for they reflect not only the individual but the society in which he lived.

Among those who delight in reading history are many who cannot afford to swap a \$20 bill for a book. And yet if boys and girls starting their history courses had such books as Mr. Davidson's, they would, by seeing the background of events, understand them better. For this reason we hope that schools, colleges and libraries are buying these volumes in wholesale lots so that people who haven't \$20 in their jeans can enjoy seeing while they read. For here is a picture book to delight Americans of every age. Left in the nursery or in grandpa's library, it will not be neglected at either extreme, and its appeal to all the ages in between is still more potent.

Undoubtedly the pictures will be more thumbed than the "over two hundred fifty thousand words of text," to quote the blurb. That will not hurt Mr. Davidson's feelings. In the first sentence of his two heavy (physically only) volumes he explains that the object of his five years' labor has been "to prepare a graphic survey of American history." I like books which lead to other books. *Life in America* certainly does that.

FORBES WATSON  
Gaylordsville, Conn.

**C. W. Ceram, *Gods, Graves, and Scholars: The Story of Archaeology*, translated by E. B. Garside, New York, Knopf, 1951. xi + 426 pp., 32 plates. \$5.75.**

There are many things which *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* is not, which students of archeology no doubt would prefer it to be. It is not a systematic history of the accumulation of archeological knowledge, ideas or techniques. Nor is it what its subtitle implies, a systematic, continuous narrative of archeological discovery.

What he meant the book to be, Mr. Ceram (a pseudonym for the editor of a German publishing house, according to the blurb on the jacket) tells us in his preface. "My book was written without scholarly pretensions. My aim was to portray the dramatic qualities of archeology, its human side." His inspiration and model in this endeavor was Paul de Kruif, who "found that even the most highly involved scientific problems can be quite simply and understandably presented if their working out is described as a dramatic process."

Actually, the book might more accurately be subtitled "Stories from Archeology," since it leans most heavily on a selection of adventurous stories of individual exploration or discovery. Mr. Ceram does on occasion summarize the knowledge of human history that was amassed with the help of these dedicated and intrepid explorers, but for the most part these are the least satisfactory sections of the book. The section on Egyptian history is completely obfuscated with Spenglerian parallels; he sinks helplessly into the morass of Mesopotamian dynastic history; his account of why we are interested in the Greeks never emerges from a cloud of rhetoric. The most enlightening summary of knowledge gained is the section on the Toltecs, Mayas and Aztecs.

It is in that section also that he presents most clearly the basically cooperative nature of archeological discovery, in which hundreds of inquirers, at home as well as abroad, plodding as well as picturesque, have contributed to the gradual clarification of human history. He does this of necessity, since after Stephens and Thompson there were no more sufficiently flamboyant adventurers in Central America; and he does it reluctantly, complaining the while that there are no more tales of derring-do to tell. Indeed, he confesses in his final section that it is because he has "deliberately chosen for portrayal those cultures whose exploration has been richly fraught

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with romantic adventure" that he has left out the Peruvian, Hittite and Indus Valley cultures, which a less romantically based history could not omit.

But again, history is the wrong word; for if that were what Mr. Ceram had in mind, the book would have to be dismissed as being far too fragmentary. For example, the section on Greek and Roman archeology deals only with the rediscovery of Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the works of Winckelmann, Schliemann and Evans—no more. Egypt and Mesopotamia are treated at greater length, but the approach is very much the same. Even the basic fact of the development of archeological method, a subject which is most fascinating to the large as well as to the specialized public, is entirely neglected.

But perhaps all this is unfair, laying more stress on the books that *should* be written than on the one that *was* written. Mr. Ceram has set down some very exciting stories. Granted his taste, it is natural that he should prefer the earliest pioneering explorers, who encountered more physical risks, or whose discoveries, being firsts, seemed more dazzling. For thrills and palpitations, of course, the best accounts of the adventures of Schliemann, Layard, Stephens, Carter, *et al.*, are the ones that those gentlemen wrote themselves—a fact of which Mr. Ceram seems to be quite aware. He tries to match them by hoking things up a bit (as heaven knows the originals did also), and by the use of a rather jerky, over-exclamatory journalistic prose. But the excitement does come through. These are, after all, as good adventure stories and treasure hunts as any, and well worth recounting.

Perhaps for this reason, plus a vigorous promotional campaign, the American public has put *Gods, Graves, and Scholars* on the best-seller list. Those thousands of readers are not getting the summary story, nor the most significant story, nor the best-balanced story of archeology. But they are getting a good story. And perhaps they will find it exciting enough to read other books on the subject. No doubt, Mr. Ceram also hopes so.

BLANCHE R. BROWN  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

## Latest Books Received



Pietro Belluschi, Shopping Center, McLaughlin Heights, Oregon,  
(from Hamlin, Forms and Functions of 20th-Century Architecture)

- Airy, Anna, MAKING A START IN ART (Studio "How to Do It" Series), New York, Studio-Crowell, 1951. 95 pp., illus., 8 color plates. \$5.
- AMERICA AND THE MIND OF EUROPE, edited by Lewis Galantière, New York, Library, 1952. 125 pp. \$2.75.
- Bacon, C. W., SCRATCHBOARD DRAWING (Studio "How to Do It" Series), New York, Studio-Crowell, 1951. 96 pp., 155 illus. \$5.
- Cernigoi, A., INCISIONI IN LEGNO E LINOLEUM, Capodistria, Pecchiari, 1951. Portfolio of 44 wood and linoleum engravings.
- CHUGHTAI'S INDIAN PAINTINGS, New Delhi, Dhoomi Mal Dharam Das, 1951. 21 text pp., 8 black-and-white + 27 color plates. Rs. 40.
- CIAM: A DECADE OF NEW ARCHITECTURE, ed. by S. Giedion, Zurich, Girsberger, 1951. 232 pp., illus. \$8.50.
- Hamlin, Talbot, editor, FORMS AND FUNCTIONS OF 20TH-CENTURY ARCHITECTURE, New York, Columbia University, 1952. Vol. I, *The Elements of Building*: li + 750 pp., 710 illus.; Vol. II, *The Principles of Composition*: xlii + 638 pp., 709 illus.; Vol. III, *Building Types*: xlix + 931 pp., 629 illus.; Vol. IV, *Building Types*: xlv + 946 pp., 588 illus. Set: \$75.
- Maurello, S. Ralph, COMMERCIAL ART TECHNIQUES, New York, Tudor, 1952. 126 pp., 452 figs. Cloth, \$3; paper, \$1.
- MEMOIRS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME: VOLUME XX (Frank Edward Brown, "Cosa I, History and Topography"; Marion Lawrence, "Additional Asiatic Sarcophagi"), Rome, 1951. 166 pp., illus.
- Ott, Richard, THE ART OF CHILDREN, New York, Pantheon, 1952. Portfolio, 7 text pp., 8 black-and-white + 17 color plates. \$6.50.

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